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No. 52

N° 52

ISSN 1180-2987

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 40th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**



**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 14 May 2012

Lundi 14 mai 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 14 May 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 14 mai 2012

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to welcome Irwin Elman, Ontario's Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, and more than 30 young people from right across the province who are children and youth in care and youth who have left the care of the children's aid society and crown ward system.

They're here this morning to deliver a very important report entitled *My Real Life Book*. I understand the youth are holding a press conference to release the report, and I invite all of my colleagues to attend a screening of the video they produced at 4 p.m. as well as their reception at 5 p.m. in the legislative dining room.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I'm delighted this morning to welcome 100 high school students, who are right here behind me. They're visiting from Chennai, India. All 100 are students of the Chettinad Vidyashram in Chennai.

They're in the GTA, Speaker, and as you can imagine, they are taking in all the sights, including of course the CN Tower and Niagara Falls. But most importantly, they are here to find out more about York University. I expect that some of them will be coming to York University a few years from now, and some might choose to make Ontario their home—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Good morning, Speaker. I would like to welcome Otter Valley Christian School from Eden in my riding. They're here today having a tour.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to introduce Ryan Park, who is in the members' gallery. Ryan is from my riding of Niagara Falls. He's in his first year at the University of Toronto taking life sciences, and he's pleased to be here to listen and to see democracy in action.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I would also like to take this opportunity to extend a very warm welcome to the teachers, principal and 100 students from Chettinad Vidyashram. It is a prestigious private school in Chennai, formerly Madras, in India. This school has over 10,000 students and 500 teachers. The Chettinad community is known for their trading expertise and takes great pride in the fact that major banks in India trace their origin to this community. Please join me in welcoming our guests and potential future international students as well as their

hosts from York University as they tour Ontario attractions.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Please welcome to the Legislative Assembly Helen Harakas and Melissa Mendes from Windfall Basics charity, providing brand new clothing to those most vulnerable. Welcome. We appreciate all that you do.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, our page Noah Alcantara-Aquino is page captain today, and his family is visiting the Legislature: Reynaldo Aquino, his father; Agnes Alcantara-Aquino, his mother; Ava Alcantara-Aquino, his sister; Amelita Alcantara, his grandmother; Mary-Grace Oledan, his aunt; and Alison Walker, a friend. We welcome them to Queen's Park today.

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: This morning, I'd like to introduce again Shaumik Baki's parents—he's one of our pages—who are here to visit us again: father, Mohammed Fazle Baki, and mother, Fouzia Baki. Thank you for attending again, and welcome.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very pleased to welcome close to 40 people from the great riding of Kitchener Centre who are down today at Queen's Park to see question period and have a tour of the Legislature. My staff have convinced me that I can't read all 40 names out, but I'd like to welcome them all and hope they have a great day today at Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Very good. This time I didn't have to stand up.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

JOB CREATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. We've seen seven months of inaction from the Ontario Liberal government when it comes to jobs, the economy and reining in government spending. Basically, in the last seven months, there was an Auditor General's report that was damning of your record. You shrugged that off. The Drummond report recommended a change in direction when it comes to government spending. You basically put Don Drummond on the shelf. And Moody's gave the province a downgrade, which was subsequently ignored.

Premier, on Friday, StatsCan came out with the latest data that showed Ontario lost 8,000 jobs while the other

provinces gained a total of 20,000 jobs. Will this finally shake the Premier out of his complacency when it comes to creating jobs in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to take the question. I see the StatsCan report a little bit differently, Speaker. It demonstrated that last month we created 23,000 full-time jobs. That follows hard on the heels of 46,000 full-time jobs created in the earlier months. In fact, since June 2009, Ontario has created 371,300 new full-time jobs here in the province of Ontario. We're leading the country in this regard. We're leading the US in this regard—certainly the Great Lakes states, Speaker—and we're leading the UK as well.

Is there more to be done? Of course there is, but I think by—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew is warned.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, the—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings, come to order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There has never been a shortage of enthusiasm from the Ottawa Valley, I must say, Speaker. That's not necessarily a bad thing.

But by any objective assessment, we are certainly moving in the right direction.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: I don't think the Premier means the same thing by "objective" as the rest of Ontario. Only the Premier could think Ontario is on the right track when we've lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs, when for 64 consecutive months Ontario's unemployment rate has been above the national average. Friday's numbers were a further condemnation of the Premier's approach. Quebec added 23,000 jobs, BC added 20,000 jobs, Alberta added 11,000 jobs, and Ontario lost 8,000 jobs.

1040

Sir, your economic policies are causing active damage to the economy: soaring energy rates, higher taxes, more government spending. Will these numbers wake up the Rip Van Winkle Premier from his slumber to change course and get our economy moving in the right direction?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I guess they've been working on that one all morning, Speaker.

The fact of the matter, again, is that we keep creating jobs here in the province of Ontario. I'll draw my honourable colleague's attention to a fabulous announcement we had just last week in northern Ontario, in the Ring of Fire district. It represents the biggest mining discovery in some 100 years in Canada. As a result of this new proposal, we're talking about thousands and thousands of new jobs that will benefit Ontario families living in the north for decades to come. That is just yet one more sign of a growing economy here in the province of Ontario.

I would encourage my honourable colleague to take off those tinted glasses and just put on some clear lenses and understand what is happening in the province of Ontario. There is good reason for optimism.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, these aren't my figures; they're Stats Canada's that demonstrate that for 64 consecutive months—he makes reference to my glasses. Perhaps the Premier should better unplug his ears and talk to real Ontarians, hard-working Ontarians, small business owners who are struggling to move ahead, and Ontarians who say that Ontario should be the leader in Canada, the number one province in this entire country for job creation, for starting a business. But you have us at the back of the pack.

One of the reasons as well, Premier, is that your expensive energy policies are driving hydro rates through the roof. We've seen a loss of 300,000 manufacturing jobs. Just because the Premier can create jobs at Ornge for Liberal friends and insiders and hand out wind and solar contracts to well-connected Liberal donors does not an economic policy make. Lower taxes, reliable and affordable energy, and reining in government spending: That's the path forward for our province. Won't you agree, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, in addition to the Stats Canada objective information, which says that Ontario remains the number one job creator in the country, I would also refer to Stats Canada, which tells us that last month Ontario led with an increase in building permits. We issued building permits in this province valued at \$2.7 billion; that's over twice that of the second-highest province, which is Quebec. Export Development Canada, another independent, reliable and objective source, tells us that Ontario will lead Canada in export growth both this year and next year at 9% growth in our exports every single year.

Again, the fact of the matter is, objectively speaking, we are moving in the right direction.

JOB CREATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: I guess, Premier, export growth means other economies are growing faster than the province of Ontario. This is the problem. You now have 64 months with higher unemployment rates than the rest of Canada.

I'll tell you again: Here is the record. Ontario lost 8,000 jobs while the rest of the—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Economic Development and Innovation is warned.

Mr. Tim Hudak: So Ontario lost 8,000 jobs while the rest of the provinces added 60,000. Those are the facts, Premier.

Your economic development minister had a press conference subsequent to the bad news from Statistics Canada. We expected him to announce a brand new eco-

conomic plan, but instead all he did was announce yet another committee with an appointee with no report-back date, no terms of reference. This is, once again, kicking the can down the road.

Premier, instead of announcing a new committee to study the problem, why not take action, take the Ontario PC idea to create 200,000 jobs through the skilled trades, good jobs that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, a slogan does not a—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Prince Edward–Hastings is warned.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I was going to say that a slogan does not make a job creation program. It takes hard work. It takes working in concert with our colleagues in the private sector, and I'm talking about employers and labour alike, and it calls for good government policies at the same time.

My honourable colleague makes fun of a new Jobs and Prosperity Council headed up by Gordon Nixon, who heads up the Royal Bank of Canada. The fact of the matter is, that's going to be a very solid council. We'll look forward to announcing the balance of the membership shortly. It will be providing specific advice with respect to how we might construct our fall economic statement and our next budget as well.

One of the things we understand is that if we're going to work successfully, we've got to keep working together. We look forward to working with our partners in the private sector.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, with all due respect, your dithering for seven months doesn't create jobs, your slogans for seven months have not created jobs, and further committees are not going to create jobs in the province.

I have had a chance to speak to Mr. Nixon, among others. I've listened to his advice, and here's the difference between Premier McGuinty and the Ontario PCs: He wants to kick the can further down the road; we want to see action when it comes to jobs and the economy today. What I worry is, this Nixon report will end up on the same shelf with Don Drummond, the Auditor General's report and countless other Liberal reports.

The time for action is now, Premier. Move forward on skilled trades. Bring in an energy policy focused on reliability and affordability, and bring in a public sector wage freeze to save \$2 billion and free up room for the private sector to grow.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I'd also draw my honourable colleague's attention to another independent source. The CFIB, Canadian Federation of Independent Business, tells us that business confidence has grown for seven months in a row now in the province of Ontario. There was a study released by the American Express folks on May 1 this year, saying that 85% of Ontario

retailers consider the financial outlook positive in the course of the next 12 months. It seems that the only person who has a permanent rain cloud over their head these days is the leader of the official opposition and his colleagues there.

The fact of the matter is, there are good reasons for us to be optimistic about our future. One of those reasons, Speaker, is that we continue to have great confidence in the people of Ontario themselves.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, sadly, the Premier likes to trivialize the real concerns of the 600,000 unemployed women and men in our province, or those who have a part-time job or that lost a good job in the manufacturing sector. And, sure, they're struggling to get by. They're proud to be bringing a paycheck home for their families, but they think, "Can't we do better, Premier, in the province of Ontario?" You dismiss their concerns as rain clouds. I say that these are the dreams and aspirations of real Ontarians, who say that better days should be ahead, that Ontario can achieve more, that we can be a leader again. We just need the right direction.

Premier, the CFIB you mentioned, they like our ideas of reliable, affordable energy, of a public sector wage freeze, getting public sector pensions under control and making sure we actually lower taxes on job creators—pro-growth, pro-economic Conservative policies to make Ontario a leader again and help those families get jobs in our province. The time for action is now. Will you move forward, Premier?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: As they say, talk is inexpensive, but when push comes to shove, when there was some heavy lifting to be done by the leaders of the province, when we put forward a proposal to move ahead with the HST to harmonize our tax system, which was the single biggest request coming out of the business community, when push came to shove, they were missing in action. They opposed that. They knew it was going to be difficult politically, so they ran away from that as fast as they possibly could.

The fact of the matter is, when push comes to shove, when there's heavy lifting to be done in this province, when it comes to doing what it takes to strengthen this economy, the people of Ontario can count on this government right here.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question this morning is for the Premier. Last week the government proudly joined Cliffs Resources as they announced plans for a feasibility study for a smelter in the riding of Nickel Belt. The project will have significant electricity needs. Can the Pre-

mier tell us, even roughly, how much electricity they're going to be using?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My understanding is, they will be using quite a bit, Speaker. I don't want to be technical, but I can say that they'll be using a lot.

We're very proud to be partnering with Cliffs in this regard. You might think of them as an anchor tenant in a very important development to take place in northern Ontario. It's a very exciting mining find, the biggest in Canada in 100 years, and we are determined to get this right for all the communities living in northern Ontario, to ensure that all our families benefit for decades to come.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, it looks like the Premier came to question period with his funny bone intact today.

The Premier and his cabinet ministers are working very closely with Cliffs; that's obvious. They're even joining them at press events. What concerns, if any, have been raised about electricity costs, and has the government responded specifically to Cliffs with any particular offers?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: We're very, very proud that last week we were able to announce that we're moving from pre-feasibility to feasibility with regard to the Cliffs project. It has an enormous opportunity for all of Ontario but in particular our First Nations communities and the people who are living in northern Ontario.

We are still in dialogue with Cliffs about a number of factors. One of them is electricity. We make no bones about that. These are important dialogues and discussions; they will continue. Once we've reached an agreement that both parties can sign off on, we'll be more than happy to make those public.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I think it's really clear that a facility of the size that they're proposing, of course, is going to have a pretty high hydro bill here in Ontario. We know that large industries already pay \$3 million more a month in Ontario than their competitors pay in adjacent provinces, like Manitoba and Quebec. Has the high cost of Ontario electricity been raised specifically by Cliffs or by other companies that plan to access the resources in the Ring of Fire?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Speaker, I'm not clear, in the question, if in fact the NDP are in favour of this investment or not. We are in favour of this investment. We are going to be working with Cliffs and any other proponent that has an opportunity to make this type of investment in the Ring of Fire in northern Ontario, because it benefits everyone in Ontario.

We are proud that we are open for business, that we are the leading jurisdiction when it comes to mining. We will continue to send out that proactive signal, because

investments like Cliffs's are good for the province of Ontario and good for the people of Ontario.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. People tell us they do want to see Ontario's resources used responsibly to create sustainable, good jobs and lasting prosperity for the people of Ontario, not ripped from the ground and shipped away as quickly as possible. But if we're going to attract those good, value-added jobs, we need affordable and reliable electricity. What is the government's plan to bring electricity costs under control in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I welcome the question, but I do want to reinforce the point made by my honourable colleague the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. It is very difficult to determine at this point in time whether or not the NDP in fact support this new development in northern Ontario. It represents thousands and thousands of new jobs. It represents a new evolution in the economy in northern Ontario. It represents the fulfillment, at least in part, of many of the hopes and dreams of people living in that part of the province. So it would be good to know, at the end of the day, whether or not the NDP in fact support this new development in northern Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: New Democrats have been pretty clear that it's time to start looking at affordable, reliable, public power in this province, the kind that's actually keeping prices affordable in places like Manitoba and Quebec. Instead, the government is pushing ahead with plans that actually limit public oversight and accountability.

Is the government going to commit to an open review of our electricity system and look honestly at a way to control costs, or are they going to keep pushing the same solutions that just have not been working?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm reminded that the northern Ontario industrial electricity rate, one we put in place through measures in our 2010 budget, which was opposed by the NDP, means that those businesses in northern Ontario have the fifth-lowest industrial electricity rates in North America, so I think we need to keep things in perspective. We're working very hard with the business community, but especially our large electricity users and especially those located in northern Ontario.

If my honourable colleague has some suggestions with respect to how we might work together to ensure that we maximize the benefits of this latest development in northern Ontario—a very exciting one—of course we would most warmly welcome those suggestions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario's electricity bills are some of the highest in Canada, and over the next decade the government says they plan to spend billions and billions on new electricity supply. In estimates committee

last week, the Minister of Energy couldn't even tell members of the committee how much he planned to spend. For families who are already paying unknown costs for cancelled power plants in Mississauga and Oakville, this is getting pretty darned scary.

Is the government going to commit to an open review of our electricity system and look honestly at ways to control our costs, or is he going to keep pushing the same old solutions that just are not working?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to remind my honourable colleague of what it is that we have done together with Ontarians. We are in the midst of a massive overhaul of our electricity system. We are rebuilding about 80% of it over the course of 20 years. We have invested in some 9,000 megawatts of new generation. We're expanding our capacity at Niagara Falls. The development that's going to take place on the Lower Mattagami in northern Ontario is the biggest of its kind in decades. I think we've put in place seven new gas plants. We are refurbishing our nuclear reactors. There have been over 5,000 kilometres of transmission lines that have been rebuilt or rehabilitated in some way. So we're talking about a massive, multibillion-dollar investment in our electricity system. There are necessarily costs associated with that, Speaker, and that's why we put in place our 10% rebate for our families.

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr. Frank Klees: To the Premier: The Minister of Health continues to defend her ministry's failure to oversee the province's emergency services and their mismanagement, and it continues. Last week, there was no air ambulance available to respond to a serious collision in the GTA because Ornge was incapable of managing its shift change. The patient died. The minister's response: "We'll look into it."

Today, we learned that a man in his 30s died yesterday here in Toronto waiting for a land ambulance that never showed up. The highest priority level emergency call, and there was no ambulance.

I ask the Premier this: How many more deaths will it take before he acknowledges that his Minister of Health and his emergency health services branch are incompetent and cannot manage this file, and when will he put someone in charge who knows what they're doing?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I do not share my honourable colleague's perspective on this. I will say that whenever there is a tragedy that unfolds, we are obviously extending our sympathies to the family and friends of those affected.

I think there are some 7,000 paramedics employed in the province of Ontario and I believe there are some 1.4 million calls on an annual basis to which they respond. Overwhelmingly, in a great majority of cases, they do the very best they can, and they provide extraordinary quality

care to Ontarians who find themselves in emergency need.

Speaker, we will look into each and every one of these cases where there appears to have been something amiss, but Ontarians can and should continue to have confidence in their ambulance system.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Air ambulances can't respond because shift changes can't be managed competently. Land ambulances can't respond to the highest-priority emergency call because scheduling can't be managed. Front-line emergency workers, doctors and schedulers have been warning this government and this minister for years that there is a systemic problem.

Speaker, the real emergency is in the minister's office and at the health services branch. It is apparent that the vital signs are absent there.

I'm going to ask the minister one more time. If, in two weeks, there were doctors not available in the emergency wards to look after patients who arrived there, the minister would immediately step in. Why is it that she allows the emergency services branch of this province to continue to demonstrate this kind of incompetency? Why can't Ontarians count on their ambulances to be there—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Premier?

1100

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll once again remind my honourable colleague that paramedics are now responding to 1.4 million requests each year. There are some 7,000 of them working to the very best of their capacity, Speaker.

I'll remind him as well that this year we will be investing \$16 million to fund nurses to assist incoming patients at the hospitals. I'll remind him as well that most of our ambulance services are delivered by the municipalities, and I'll remind him again that we have uploaded some of those costs. We're now sharing it on a 50-50 basis, something their party continues to oppose.

Again, we will continue to work in partnership with our front-line workers to ensure we're delivering the best possible care to Ontario families.

CASINOS

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Paul Godfrey, the chair of the OLG, doesn't seem to be interested in waiting until 2014 for a Toronto-wide referendum on a casino. Even though Mississauga council hasn't officially weighed in on a casino, Mr. Godfrey said, "We'll build it in Mississauga or somewhere else first."

Will the Minister of Finance commit to the people of Toronto, Mississauga or anywhere else that they'll be able to vote on a possible casino in their respective community?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, there is a process under way to locate a new casino in a willing host municipality somewhere in the GTA. There have been ex-

pressions of interest from a number of municipalities. We will leave it to those municipalities to determine the process upon which they will determine if there is a willingness in the community to host such an opportunity. I've indicated in the past that if a community doesn't wish to host a casino, they simply won't be required to do so.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: The government seems to be in a rush, even though it hasn't begun to look at the impact of a new casino. In fact, while the OLG's chair is talking about a casino on Toronto's waterfront, when the NDP put in a freedom-of-information request, the response we got from OLG says it hasn't conducted a social impact study yet because "no specific municipality has been identified for a new location."

Can the minister explain why OLG seems to be moving full steam ahead on a casino in Toronto without conducting a social impact study?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, part and parcel of any planned expansion of gaming in Ontario, whether it's in the greater Toronto area or elsewhere, would involve precisely those kinds of studies. On an ongoing basis, we look at the impact of gambling. In fact, Ontario has the most generous support for people with gaming addictions anywhere in North America at more than \$40 million a year.

So as this process unfolds, I expect there will be ample debate, ample opportunity for those opponents in any of the municipalities which have expressed a high-level interest in this type of development to look at these questions, to examine them, if they choose to take it to a referendum within their communities. We will continue to respect that, Mr. Speaker, and we'll work co-operatively with any municipality that has an interest in exploring the opportunity of developing another gaming facility here in the greater Toronto area.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. My constituents up in Willowdale have reminded me recently that in February your ministry introduced a bill that will repeal the 1939 Public Works Protection Act—that's the bill that contributed to all the G20 problems about two years ago. They know that the bill was enacted early in World War II. They feel that it's out of line with what's going on in society today. They're looking forward to the legislation that was proposed by Chief Justice McMurtry, who was also a former Conservative Attorney General.

I know that the bill has been sent to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy—I've been sitting on the committee from time to time—and what's happening, Minister, is that the bill has just stalled there. It's plagued with delay, adjournments, bell ringing and all sorts of obstructionism by the PC caucus members. What can we do to move the bill—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Merci, monsieur le Président. Je veux remercier le membre de Willowdale pour sa question.

I agree that the Public Works Protection Act is outdated and needs to be replaced with new legislation. In fact, all parties in one form or another have expressed support for Bill 34. The bill is now in front of the standing committee on justice, but it has been stifled by the Conservative political tactics and by inexcusable 11th-hour submissions from both opposition parties. These delay tactics, such as adjournment of committee and bringing replacements at the last minute, affect our ability to timely address Justice McMurtry's recommendations.

It's a new day, and with it I hope we see a new approach from the official opposition when they finally get back to work for Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: Thank you, Minister. The bill has been in front of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, and as I said, I've been sitting in on that committee. There were a number of concerns raised by participants at the committee. Specifically, some of those concerns were that members of the public—issues about having to produce identification before entering court premises, the accommodation of faith issues in the courts, and the warrantless search of vehicles that are not actually on court premises. We heard about those concerns and I know that there are recommendations that have been put forward by our government to address those concerns, but notwithstanding that, the bill is still being stalled by the obstructionism, the bell ringing and the delay tactics—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): While I understand the situation that you're trying to describe, it is the tradition of this place to talk about government policy and not committee work. I will allow the last part of that question. But the minister will respond in the way I have requested.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have made some change to Bill 34 in an effort to strike the right balance. But whatever changes we bring forward, I fear that the opposition will continue to play games with this Legislature—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is for the government House leader. It's clear that the government's refusal to take necessary steps to restore confidence in Ornge is born out of its desire to wash its hands of the scandal and blame "rogue operators" for the corruption that has taken place under its very nose. Despite the ongoing scandal at Ornge being a sordid tale of greed, deceit and corruption—all of which have compromised patient safety—not a single person has been held accountable by this government, either in the minister's office or in the ministry. So I ask the House leader: Does

he agree with the Premier's decision to absolve the Minister of Health and the emergency health services branch for putting patient safety at risk—patient safety, House leader, which Ontarians expect from them and those services?

Hon. John Milloy: I 100% support the strong action that's been taken by our Minister of Health to get to the bottom of the Ornge situation and to correct it. I support her bringing forward Bill 50, which is the final piece of the puzzle and which the opposition continues to oppose through childish bell-ringing tactics.

The member opposite seems to pretend that no one is looking into the issue of Ornge. The fact of the matter is that the public accounts committee has so far sat for 24 hours and heard from 30 witnesses. Last week, for example, they heard from Rick Potter, former Ornge chief aviation officer. He testified that he was recruited by PC lobbyist Kelly Mitchell through his Conservative connections to sit on the Ornge board for \$1,000 a meeting. He also testified that he has been a lifelong member of the Conservative Party and was a candidate in Thunder Bay. 1110

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: House leader, you won't be getting Bill 50 till we get a proper inquiry into Ornge.

It's clear that the Liberal government will stop at nothing to shield itself from the ongoing scandal at Ornge. This includes allowing for ongoing risk to patient safety. The government has continually been asleep at the switch, laughing off questions from the PC and NDP caucuses with flippant and cavalier answers.

The failure of the health minister and her bureaucrats to provide oversight at Ornge is totally unacceptable. Since the House leader has been tasked with cleaning up the Minister of Health's mess, can he share with the House when Ontarians can expect to see the individuals responsible for putting patients at risk removed from their positions?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure I'm not the only one in the Legislature who noted the fact that the member stands up and admits that his party is going to block the recommendations of the Auditor General which are contained in Bill 50 that is before this Legislature—

Interjections: Ornge, Ornge, Ornge.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member from Halton is warned.

Government House leader?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, the honourable member stands up and admits—he calls for the government to take action and then he admits that he and his party are going to block the recommendations of the Auditor General which are contained in Bill 50.

He also tries to lead people to believe there is not an investigation going on into the Ornge situation. I would remind him again of the Auditor General's report. I would remind him of the good work of the public accounts committee. I would remind him of the Ontario Provincial Police, which is looking into the matter—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question?

ABORIGINAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Sarah Campbell: My question is for the Premier. Last week, this government made an announcement on the Ring of Fire without bringing First Nations to the table and without any assurances around job and training opportunities for the First Nation communities in the region. NAN Deputy Grand Chief Terry Waboose says that the government is not listening to First Nation aspirations for their youth and children.

Does this government have a plan to ensure First Nations workers will receive the training they need to benefit from development in the Ring of Fire?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Absolutely, yes, the government does have a plan to ensure that First Nations people are brought into not only training opportunities and skills development, but also into the consultations around environmental monitoring, around resource revenue-sharing. It is a whole package of involvement on behalf of First Nations.

As I said last week, the business decision that was made was made as a business decision and it had to be made in confidence. But the fact is that now we start that larger formal consultation to make sure that all of the First Nations involved and the children for generations to come have the opportunity to benefit from this terrific project.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: The Ring of Fire is not going to work unless it involves opportunities for the First Nations that live near the mining site.

Last week in question period, following the Cliffs announcement, Minister Duncan made some lofty claims about the 1,200 First Nation Ontarians who will be hired to work in the Ring of Fire, but in fact, there hasn't been any commitment for First Nations job training.

Will the Premier commit to actual funding and a strategy to ensure that First Nations can take advantage of the employment opportunities the Ring of Fire provides?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, as I said last week, one of the first trips I made when I was appointed to this ministry was to Webeque, which is one of the communities that is very close to the Ring of Fire. The conversations that I had with the people in Webeque were about exactly this: They were about training opportunities, they were about the skills development that was going to be needed; they were about the location of those training facilities to make sure that the young people involved can access those opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely aware that without the involvement of First Nations people, without that workforce—and folks in Kenora said to me last week that the First Nations people in northern Ontario are the workforce for northwestern Ontario. So it's absolutely part of the plan. We know that the Ring of Fire cannot be successful unless First Nations people are brought up to

speed, they have training opportunities and they're involved.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is to the Minister of Education. Confronting bullying is a key issue, one that is very important to me and many of the MPPs in this Legislature, but most importantly to kids and parents in our schools and communities across the province. We all know heartbreaking stories of the impact bullying has on our kids and the poisonous effect it has on our school environment.

Bullying can take many forms and affects a cross-section of children, especially our LGBT youth, who are often susceptible to bullying and intolerance. That's why student-led groups like gay-straight alliances are an important tool for addressing this problem, and research shows that they make a real difference.

As the Legislature considers anti-bully legislation to address these problems, Speaker, through you, would the minister tell us what Bill 13 says about GSAs?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I want to thank the member for Ottawa Centre for being such a strong advocate for anti-bullying initiatives, both in his riding and here at the Legislature.

Speaker, there has been a lot of misinformation about single-issue, student-led groups like gay-straight alliances. If passed, Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act, says that schools must support students if they want to form a group like this. There's nothing radical about making sure that students have the support they need to succeed in school, and that's what Bill 13 is all about. It's about making sure that every student, regardless of race, culture, creed, gender or sexual orientation, feels safe and respected and welcome at school. It's not about the names of the clubs.

I'm confident that Catholic schools can operationalize this legislation. That's why we have the support from the Catholic teachers' association and from the Catholic school trustees.

I want to tell you what some of the names of the clubs are: Embracing Xavier Equality at St. Francis Xavier, Anti-Homophobia Alliance, Born Equal, Dialog, Youth Embracing Sexualities. It's about the support for students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: There's certainly nothing radical about our young people being supported in school by their peers. The Accepting Schools Act, Bill 13, provides protection for all students and helps our kids support each other. That's why it is difficult to hear the Progressive Conservative Party and their allies attack this legislation as somehow divisive because of this.

Speaker, I can't imagine what my colleagues opposite think is divisive about student-led support groups for kids, groups that have the approval of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association. It seems that the PC Party doesn't want kids to have the choice to form

student-led groups. They think that kids should choose French fries and gravy for lunch, but not choose support clubs. I just don't get it.

Minister, you have said that you will work with the opposition to pass anti-bullying legislation, and our kids are waiting on us. Speaker, will the minister tell this House if she will remove that provision from the Accepting Schools Act to do so?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I had a lot of opportunity in this House to talk about the good elements that exist in Bill 14, but let me be very clear: The provision in Bill 13 about student-led clubs, such as gay-straight alliances, is an important provision. It helps promote a more accepting school climate. It's only the Accepting Schools Act that includes that provision, to ensure that kind of support in schools.

When it comes to making schools safe for our students, the PC caucus is clearly divided. Last week, we saw the member for Nepean–Carleton be supportive of GSAs. Later that day, though, unfortunately, the PC leader disagreed with her and issued a statement and sent his press secretary out to reverse the position. The PC leader's office said that the party will oppose Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act, because of the provision for GSAs. I'm very disappointed. This is about providing support for students. Student-led clubs provide that exact support.

CASINOS

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question is to the Minister of Finance. On April 26, here in this Legislature, I tabled my private member's bill, Bill 76, to give Ontarians their say about casino development in their communities.

Minister, the word on the street is, you're trying to bully your caucus into allowing casino development to happen all over the province, without any local input, all in a cynical attempt to fund your spiralling deficits.

Your party's chief whip; a fellow cabinet minister and deputy House leader; and five other prominent Liberal caucus members voted with the PCs and NDP to give local decision-making to the people. Minister, will you stand in your place today and look your seven courageous Liberal colleagues in the eye and tell them that you support them by allowing referendums for future casino development?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: When it comes to private members' business, our members are allowed to vote the way they see fit, unlike the Tories on the bullying bill. In the morning, one member says one thing; the leader brings her down, and they change the policy overnight and re-establish the policy.

1120

The provision for referendum exists in the Municipal Act; it has for many years. We've said that any willing host has the opportunity to determine how they will gauge winning conditions or will gauge what it means, the willingness. We welcome the provisions of the Municipal Act. I'm glad our caucus members vote freely on

private members' bills. We respect them. We have strong debate within this caucus, unlike that party, which won't stand up for kids who are being bullied in our schools all over Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It sounds like a divided caucus and cabinet on that side of the House. The Liberal members from Etobicoke Centre, Mississauga East-Cooksville, Don Valley East, York Centre, your chief government caucus whip, the member from Peterborough, and the cabinet minister from St. Catharines and deputy House leader all supported the PC bill to give local decision-making on casino development to the people of Ontario. Minister, your colleagues think it's right to give residents a say on local casinos. Why do you think it's wrong?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The Municipal Act permits municipalities to conduct referendums. It has been there for many years. I think the member opposite, instead of criticizing and trying to find fault here, maybe ought to tell his constituents why he's voting against the southwest Ontario economic development fund. At a time when his riding and communities have been hard hit by decisions made by outside interests, that member chose to vote against the most progressive policies on economic development for southwest Ontario. I guess we ought not to be surprised, because when it came, for instance, to horse racing, he said to keep the subsidy. He says that here, but in his riding, he puts out press releases that say that "one of his biggest mistakes has been to shovel out business subsidies.... Back home in Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, local business owners do perfectly well without handouts from Queen's Park." Flip-flop.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Education: 275 schools across Ontario are closing or facing closing. A People for Education report indicates that the accommodation review process for closing schools is broken. It pits community against community. It doesn't adequately explore other community uses for schools. Will the minister launch a review to fix the process and encourage alternative community use of schools?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very proud to be part of a government that has built or is building, since 2003, 400 new schools in this province. We have made significant investments in our education to ensure that we have new, modern buildings so that we can have our students in those buildings. At the same time as we have increased investment, seeing \$6.6 billion or 46%, we've seen a decline in enrolment of 121,000 students.

Since we came into office, we have reformed the process. We have ensured that there is community dialogue, that the accommodation review guidelines are in place and that we have those local conversations. That being said, we are always prepared to make sure that that con-

versation is inclusive and includes other community partners, and that's exactly what we said we would do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Minister, on Saturday, students and parents in Welland, St. Catharines, Cambridge, Peterborough and Sudbury all spoke out against the closure of schools in their communities. They don't want their children bussed across town. They don't want valuable community space sold off. Parents need to know that every viable option is being explored. Why won't you fix the accommodation review process and make sure that we have a proper search for alternative community use?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: We do believe in working with our partners in education, and we believe very strongly in the important role that locally elected school boards take, because they know their community best. They're best able to facilitate that local conversation.

There are measures that we need to put in place, and our focus is on ensuring that we spend dollars on students and not on heating empty buildings. I know the NDP has knowledge of this, because when they were in power, 150 schools in this province closed. These are very difficult conversations. We look to the leadership of our school boards, and we will be there, at the Ministry of Education, to facilitate the bringing together of community partners so that we can spend our education dollars on our students and not on empty buildings.

FRUIT GROWERS

Mr. Kim Craitor: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, in my riding of Niagara many of my constituents proudly grow apples and tender fruit, such as peaches, nectarines, cherries, pears and plums. As you know, there have been widespread reports over the past few weeks about damage to apple and tender fruit crops due to the warm weather we experienced in March, which caused the fruit trees to come out of dormancy, followed by a cold snap in April that caused frost damage to the budding fruit.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you please inform the House and the people of the Ontario the effects of the weather on the fruit crop in Ontario?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Thanks very much to the member from Niagara Falls. I certainly recognize the serious impact the recent cold snap has had on the tender fruit and apple producers in Ontario. In fact, just last week I had the opportunity to tour Mountainview Orchards, an apple farm of Richard and Peter Feenstra, and to view first-hand the damage done there. Our staff from OMAFRA and Agricorp, of course, have been on the ground talking to farmers about this and working with the apple growers and the Ontario tender fruit processors. We understand all too well over here just how important this loss is to farmers, and not just in economic terms.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Kim Craitor: Thanks, Minister. I know the apple and tender fruit producers, who are my constituents, are glad to know the industry is important to our government.

As you know, Minister, Ontario accounts for 40% of all the apples grown in Canada. Ontario apple crops have an annual farm gate of \$63 million. It's important to note that Ontario's tender fruit crops have an annual farm gate of \$40 million. The cold snap that happened a few weeks ago has seriously impacted fruits for this year and will for a few more weeks, before we know the true extent of the loss.

Mr. Speaker, again, through you to the minister: Can you outline your ministry and what it's doing to assist people and the tender fruit farmers at this time?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Speaker, my ministry and Agricorp have been on the ground for the last several weeks working with those potentially impacted, and it's our plan to continue to work with the apple growers and the tender fruit growers to assess the damage and to respond.

I'm also pleased to report that last Thursday I had the opportunity to speak with Minister Corbeil from the province of Quebec as well as federal Minister Ritz with respect to the suite of potential programs to assist tender fruit growers, and they will stand with Ontario and we with our tender fruit and apple growers, as we move forward to assess the damage and look at how best to respond.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. As the Premier knows, the government is entertaining a proposal by wpd Canada to build wind turbines as tall as 500 feet in close proximity to the Collingwood Regional Airport. The Chair of the airport board, Mr. Charlie Tatham, called the proposal "asinine, unjustified, and dangerous." In a letter to the company, Mr. Tatham told the proponents "the most damning thing of all is that your proposed placement of wind turbine obstacles beside the airport will inevitably lead to damages and losses and could cause injury and death."

Why is the government even entertaining a project that would compromise safety at the Collingwood Regional Airport?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would like to remind the member that, if we quote things, that there are ways in which that can happen—and I just offer everyone a caution: If you read a quote, you still can't use unparliamentary language. Okay?

Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The member will know that the renewable energy approach is one that's very extensive, that every application goes through a very long and extensive examination and that, obviously, questions of public safety, such as those involved with airports or other structures, are very much considered.

1130

Actually, airport safety is a federal jurisdiction matter in most cases, and those regulations and rules would take precedence in virtually every circumstance. My friend

may be getting far ahead of the approvals process for a particular contract, but just to repeat, the approvals process is very long and extensive. It looks at public safety issues, structure issues, environmental and other issues.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Minister, that's a rather out-of-touch response. The problem is, there are no rules about windmills in proximity to airports because no one ever thought someone or any government would be stupid enough as to put 500-foot-tall windmills on flight paths leading to regional airports.

Mr. Speaker, municipal councils in Collingwood, Clearview and Wasaga Beach have all passed resolutions echoing the concerns that the board itself has expressed.

In another letter to wpd Canada, Mr. Tatham continues to plead for common sense to prevail. He wrote: "And so we remain with our assertion ... that there is absolutely no reason whatsoever to place these startlingly tall and potentially dangerous structures adjacent to a busy general aviation airport, other than you"—the company—"have apparently obtained willing property owners. How sad, and so completely unnecessary."

Again, Mr. Speaker, when will the government start paying attention to the warnings from the experts who sit on the board of the Collingwood Regional Airport?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I think really my friend opposite would know that there are always rules and regulations relating to aircraft safety that must be complied with. There have long been and there still are, and the federal government has responsibility over aviation.

With respect to the particular issue that is raised, I understand that there may be litigation pending surrounding it. My friend would know better than to ask a member of the government or this House to start commenting on matters that are either before the courts or involved in litigation. That wouldn't be the appropriate way to resolve issues.

The renewable energy approval process is very extensive. We've streamlined the decision-making process, but we've done so in a way that enhances safety, adds to environmental protection and just gets to decisions faster.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: The Ontario flag is now flying at half-mast in northeastern Ontario communities. It's a sombre ritual—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question to who, please?

Mr. John Vanthof: To the Premier. I'm sorry.

It's a sombre ritual that's usually reserved for a death or a severe tragedy. In this case, the death is of passenger and rail transportation service in northeastern Ontario, and the tragedy will be even more trucks on our single-lane highways and the response of what's seemingly an uncaring government.

According to Al McDonald, the mayor of North Bay, "The fact that the Premier will not even acknowledge the

mayors' concerns regarding ONTC is the straw that broke the camel's back." Premier, my question is simple: Why do you refuse to even acknowledge the concerns of northern municipalities?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The fact of the matter is that we had a very, very good meeting on April 19, and the mayors gave us their points of view. The reality is, we cannot sustain the ONTC in its present format, and so we have chosen to divest the ONTC. I told the mayors that I'd be more than happy to discuss parameters with regard to the ONTC. In fact, later on this week, Infrastructure Ontario, our agent for divestment, will be informing FONOM with regard to the process. The reality is, we are moving forward with divestment. I've told the mayors on an ongoing basis that we will meet with the mayors and that we will listen to the mayors when it comes to ideas with regard to divestment. The reality is, the decision to divest has been made.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again to the Premier: Tough decisions are best made when all facts are on the table, like the fact that all public transportation in the province is subsidized, not just the ONTC, and that you include all the impacted groups in those decisions, like the mayors and the customers of ONTC, in meaningful discussions about the future of our region. "Meaningful discussions" is not having MTO striking another committee to look at northern transportation after you announce the closure of ONTC.

Once again to the Premier: Will you commit to meet with the northern mayors right now to discuss issues that are crucial to the north?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: At the April 19 meeting with the mayors, we committed to ensuring that we have an ongoing dialogue. They can bring their ideas forward with regard to divestment.

But you know, Speaker, I find it pretty rich. The third party is now the defender of the ONTC, but when they had the opportunity to make a difference, the member from Timmins-James Bay sat on his hands, the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane sat on his hands, the member from Nickel Belt sat on her hands, the member from Algoma-Manitoulin sat on his hands. The reality is, when they had the opportunity to stand up for the ONTC, they chose instead to support the horse racing industry.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, this question is for the minister responsible for the Pan Am Games.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Order. The member from Essex come to order.

The member from Mississauga-Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Speaker.

This question is for the minister responsible for the Pan Am Games. People all over southern Ontario are

talking about the 2015 Pan and Parapan Am Games in Ontario. The games will attract thousands of tourists, help promote physical activity and focus international attention on all that Ontario has to offer. It will also be a huge economic driver, stimulating millions of dollars of investment in much-needed sporting facilities and improved transportation infrastructure. Ontario communities will also gain thousands of new jobs.

Minister, last week you announced a number of games venues. Would you update the House on the status of the Pan Am Games venues?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you to the member for Mississauga-Streetsville for the question. I was indeed very pleased to announce last week in partnership with Toronto 2015 and the federal government that the majority of the Pan and Parapan Am Game venues have been finalized and are proceeding on schedule.

These will truly be the people's games. Events will be hosted in communities across the Golden Horseshoe, including Toronto, Scarborough, Etobicoke, Markham, Mississauga, Hamilton, Caledon, Orangeville, Welland, Minden, St. Catharines, and negotiations are well under way with the town of Milton for the construction of an all-seasons, four-seasons velodrome.

The people's games will be accessible and affordable, benefiting communities throughout the greater Golden Horseshoe and attracting visitors from around the world.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Kitchener-Conestoga on a point of order.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome a good friend of mine on his inaugural visit to the Legislature today, Mr. Bill Maginas in the members' gallery. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank you again for allowing the youth in care to use your gallery and to welcome them into the House this morning and also to welcome the youth in care who are not able to be in the House with us this morning but are watching live on TV and through the computer systems. It's quite important to them today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want to thank the member for stealing my thunder, because I was going to introduce in the Speaker's gallery and on both sides of our visitors' galleries the guests of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, the young people who have been responsible for the Youth Leaving Care hearings and the report which they will be releasing later today.

We welcome our guests and thank them for their hard work for us.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1139 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Some of these individuals weren't able to join us this morning. I'd like to welcome Irwin Elman, who is in the gallery, Ontario's Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, as well as many members of the Youth Leaving Care team. They are a group of remarkable individuals who have worked extraordinarily hard over the last year to produce *My Real Life Book*, which is a report to improve outcomes for children and youth living in care. I'd like to welcome them all to the Legislature this afternoon.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We welcome our guests, for sure. Thank you.
Introductions?

Hon. John Milloy: We have a large delegation here in the gallery from Kitchener Centre. I'd like members to help me welcome Bill Arends, Charlie Love, Doug Cakebread, Wanda Cakebread, Jane Arnold, Ben Jackson, Pinghu Chen, Lin He, Roel Vis, Wayne Morris, Pauline Morris, Andy McAuliffe, Norma McAuliffe, Kevin Bedford, Oleg Feldgaj, David Schenk, Carolyn Longman, Lauris DaCosta, Sue Morgan, Robin Le Lopez-Nguyen, Kennedy Lopez-Nguyen, Dan Pink, Mary Zilney, Carolyn Albrecht, Corrine Ament, Phil Charbonneau, Andreas Fuentes Martinez, Christina Romualdo, Andrew Hilliard, Alyssa Clelland, Ryan Clelland, Dawn Clelland, Nayda Cakebread Mateus, Joyce Palubiski, Ed Simon, Claudine Dey, Shirley Hyman—and that's it, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think you've just introduced everybody in the House. I appreciate that from the government House leader. Thank you.

Introduction of guests?

Mr. John O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry for being a bit late here. I'm welcoming a grade 10 civics class from Bowmanville High School and their teachers Debbie Williams and Kevin Goss. Welcome to Queen's Park. They'll be here shortly.

Miss Monique Taylor: I again just want to reiterate what—Minister Hoskins has introduced all the youth in care who are able to be here with us in the House today, but I also want to extend that once again to the youth in care who are not able to be here with us at Queen's Park and are watching us at home today by however means.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Mr. Bill Walker: I rise today to congratulate two outstanding volunteers, both from the great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, for their selfless contribution to their communities and positive inspiration as role models.

I would first like to recognize Janette Hammell, who is just one of six recipients of the 2012 Ontario Medal for Young Volunteers. The honour is awarded to volunteers

between the ages of 15 and 24 for contributing significant amounts of time and effort to their community. Janette Hammell coordinated a local, volunteer-run soccer league which currently has around 300 participants of all ages, and did that almost single-handedly. This exceptional young woman also went the extra mile as an agricultural ambassador for Bruce county. Not only did she reach out to fellow community members, but in particular, children who didn't have the opportunity to learn about agriculture on a regular basis. In her role as ambassador, she worked hard to promote agricultural awareness, safety and sustainability to over 120 primary students.

Next, I would like to acknowledge the success of the South Grey Bruce Youth Literacy Council. They received the 2012 June Callwood Outstanding Achievement Award for exceptional work in teaching youth literacy skills through a hands-on experience. Their mentorship program aims to encourage a partnership effort between a tutor and a learner to work to improve grades.

I'd like the House to join me in congratulating both Janette Hammell and the South Grey Bruce Youth Literacy Council for their dedication to the learning and futures of our youth citizens. It was my privilege to attend both awards ceremonies and congratulate these constituents in person for their outstanding achievements. Thank you on behalf of the people of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Ms. Cindy Forster: The District School Board of Niagara is deciding the fate of two high schools and an elementary school in my riding, and the whole process in itself is questionable. Many are feeling the closures are a done deal regardless of what input has been provided at the local level through the accommodation review committee.

Trustees will make the final decision on the future of Crowland Central school in Cooks Mills, Thorold Secondary high school and West Park Secondary School in St. Catharines next month. It has pitted schools against each other, when each individual site and its impact on the local area is what should be addressed.

Protests over school closures were held across the province over the weekend, including in Niagara. They want the Premier to know that they're not happy with the province and its total lack of concern over these closures and leaving it in the hands of trustees. Presentations are continuing by local school groups at the board level fighting for these important schools for their community. Each of these areas will be gutted if the schools close in the name of cost savings.

Speaker, having students spend their lives on buses as their local school closes is simply not viable. The cost of busing for the District School Board of Niagara is over \$17 million a year. The McGuinty government shares a lot of the blame for the funding formula for schools that

it promised to review. It has not changed since 1997, when introduced by the Harris government, and the review was promised in 2007.

Minister, intervene and put a moratorium on these closures until the process used for closing them is fixed.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Vic Dhillon: Our government is taking strong action for a serious time. The single most important thing we can do right now to grow the economy and create jobs is to balance the budget.

A vibrant economy will allow us to protect the gains we've made and the services that matter most to Ontario families, like health care and education.

Our plan to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18 is working, and our province's economy is making steady progress. In April, Ontario continued to lead Canada in job creation, accounting for more than half of the full-time jobs created across the country.

The global and US economies may not be out of the woods just yet, and there's still more work to do. That's why we're creating a Jobs and Prosperity Council to advise the government on job creation and productivity. The council will include leaders from business, labour, academia, government, and non-governmental associations. It will be led by Mr. Gordon Nixon, who's the president and CEO of the Royal Bank of Canada. They will generate ideas to boost Ontario's long-term productivity and competitiveness so that we can encourage homegrown success stories and attract more foreign investment.

While the official opposition are more interested in playing politics, only the McGuinty government has a plan to create good jobs for Ontario families.

BILL MOODY

Mr. Ted Arnott: On May 5, one of my best friends, and perhaps the greatest community builder I've ever known, passed away.

Bill Moody dedicated his life to making his community a stronger, better and more caring place. A teacher by profession, he served as a town councillor in Mount Forest.

He was also Canada's representative on the board of directors of Lions International, where he represented all the Lions clubs in our country. He helped to start and organize countless Lions clubs throughout North America.

Bill was instrumental in the establishment of the Lions Foundation of Canada's dog guides centre in Oakville. This centre has trained more than 1,700 dog guides for blind, deaf and other special-needs men, women and children.

He was also the founding executive director of Lions Quest Canada, an organization which has developed drug prevention, violence prevention and anger management programming for students.

Bill also served the larger community of Ontario with distinction as the chair of the Ontario Film Review Board, which has the important responsibility of classifying films to give parents the information they need to decide which movies their kids shouldn't see.

I tell my own sons that when they grow up, "You have three big obligations in order to have a full life. You have your family life, your professional life and your community life. You can't have a full life without all three."

Bill Moody's life taught me that. Through his tireless work, he has left a lasting legacy and made Ontario a better place.

I know that I speak for all members when I offer our condolences to Bill's wife, Kaye, and the rest of the Moody family.

NURSES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Today, I want to talk about a wonderful experience that I had last week, hosted by the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario at Take Your MPP to Work Day. Nurses from across the province invited MPPs from all political parties to experience a day in their working life.

For myself, I was at the University Hospital in London, where I met Janet Hunt, chapter president for RNAO Middlesex-Elgin. Janet asked us to think about the experiences we were about to have in terms of our critical responsibilities. She suggested that each of us use this as an opportunity to engage beyond the experience of job shadowing and make lasting connections into their world through our own work experiences. I thought that this was an innovative approach and was eager to learn more. Politicians like myself could learn about the multi-faceted roles that nurses have in our communities, see how nurses use their knowledge and skills to better the health of the population, and have an opportunity to observe RNs interact with patients.

I was assigned to and had the pleasure of being accompanied by Jeanette Mills, the RN coordinator. We were on the floor for infectious control, and Jeanette described the many initiatives that her floor has taken to implement and reduce the spread of infections to patients, nurses and visitors.

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CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: I'm proud today to stand for the over 8,000 children and youth currently living in care across the province and for the thousands of youth who grew up in care before them.

Earlier today, the Youth Leaving Care hearings team, a group made up of both youth in and from care, courageously submitted a very humbling report titled My Real Life Book to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I encourage all of my colleagues in this House to read it.

The purpose of this report is to improve the experiences and lives of youth living in care. For years, these youth felt they weren't being listened to. These hearings provided a venue for them to share with us their feelings, their hopes and their aspirations. We must continue to listen. They must be included in the decision-making process when deciding how to best enhance the system in this province.

I'm very proud to table in this House later today a private member's bill to proclaim May 14 as Children and Youth in Care Day in the province of Ontario. This bill, if passed, will raise awareness, reduce stigma and recognize children and youth in care.

I want to congratulate the Youth Leaving Care hearings team on their report, and I hope that all of my colleagues on both sides of this House will join me in supporting this very important bill later this afternoon.

Again, to everyone who was here earlier today for the presentation, thank you for the wonderful presentation and thank you for putting forward this report.

KIDS' FISHING DAY

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I'd like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to all the groups and volunteers who worked so hard for our 12th Annual Kids' Fishing Day at Heber Down Conservation Area last Saturday.

The beautiful, sunny weather was enjoyed by all, and many fish were caught. A great crowd of parents and kids alike came out to take part in the fun-filled day of fishing and outdoor activities. It was a no-cost event, and the children were able to take part in many activities, including conservation, wetland and trapping displays, lure making, face painting and fish identification.

Numerous groups and organizations gave their time and effort for this special day, and I'd like to take the time to thank them for all of their help: the Boys and Girls Club of Durham region; Calvary Baptist Church; Central Lake Ontario Conservation Authority; Ducks Unlimited; Durham Regional Police Service; Kids, Cops and Canadian Tire; Lindsay Trappers Council; Ministry of Natural Resources, Aurora district; Muskies Canada; Ontario Deer Hound Association; Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, Zone E; Ontario Sporting Dog Association; Optimist Club of Oshawa; Oshawa Community Health; Pickering Rod and Gun Club; Simcoe Hall Settlement House; South Central Ontario Fish and Wildlife Association; Toronto Sportsmen's Show; Valu-Mart, Lindsay; W.T. Hawkins; Westmount Kiwanis; and my two sons, Josh and Garrett, along with Max and Simon Lysyk, who made more than 1,500 snow cones for the kids.

There is an old adage that says, "Fish bite best before the storm," and certainly this was the case on Saturday, and numerous rainbow trout were caught by the young anglers. The wonderful weather enhanced the spirits of the kids who enjoy the great outdoors.

Thanks again to everyone who worked tirelessly and made this day a huge success for the children of our community.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You had an extra four seconds; you could have added a couple of more volunteers.

DRIVEN TO QUIT CHALLENGE

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I rise today to congratulate the winners of the 2012 Driven to Quit Challenge. The Driven to Quit Challenge is a fantastic initiative hosted annually by the Canadian Cancer Society to encourage tobacco users in Ontario to quit smoking and build awareness of the supports and resources available to help them be successful.

The Canadian Cancer Society's partnership with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and its seven tobacco control area networks is now in its seventh year. This year they achieved the highest number of participants yet, with over 37,000 Ontarians who registered to make an attempt to quit smoking, and 40% of participants have reached out to the smokers' helpline for support.

Please join me in congratulating this year's winners and commend them for kicking the habit. Eric Huynh, Paul DeSerres, Dallas Fitzgerald, Natalie Doussept, Melissa Wice, John Vanderwerf and Alyssa Beach-Wallis were the regional prize winners, taking home \$2,000 in cash. Benjamin O'Leary and Ken Daub were the vacation prize winners, receiving a \$5,000 vacation from the CAA; and Amy Ladouceur of Hamilton took home the grand prize, a 2012 Ford Edge.

Congratulations to all the winners and to the Canadian Cancer Society for bringing us ever closer to our goal of becoming a smoke-free Ontario.

BREAST CANCER

Mr. John Yakabuski: Tonight, the Tampa Bay Rays are in town to face the Toronto Blue Jays. That's not particularly noteworthy. What is noteworthy is that tonight the Blue Jays, as all 30 major league teams have done, will be going to bat in the fight against breast cancer.

A representative was chosen for each major league team. The Blue Jays representative happens to be my sister-in-law Vicky Yakabuski, the wife of my brother Lawrie. While the recognition was officially part of Mother's Day, the Blue Jays ceremony had to be scheduled for tonight, their next home date. Tonight Vicky will take part in pre-game activities and be honoured during an on-field ceremony.

Vicky was chosen to represent the Blue Jays because of her own face-to-face battle with breast cancer. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in September 2008 and underwent surgery and chemotherapy as part of her treatment. The following year, she helped organize a separate Run for the Cure in York region. She did more. She

entered a team, aptly named Team Victorious, that was the largest fundraising team in the region and was honoured by the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation. For Vicky, it wasn't enough to just beat cancer personally; she has accepted the challenge of fighting it on behalf of others.

Breast cancer is a life-altering experience for the victim as well as their family. I want to salute Vicky, Lawrie and their two girls, Julia and Jenna, for the courage they have shown throughout and the loving support they have given one another. Tonight we can show our support for all of those who have survived or are currently battling breast cancer by attending the game, supporting the cause and committing ourselves to finding a cure. Until then, we will continue to fight back.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE DAY ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE JOUR DES ENFANTS ET DES JEUNES PRIS EN CHARGE

Mrs. Piruzza moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 90, An Act to proclaim Children and Youth in Care Day / Projet de loi 90, Loi proclamant le Jour des enfants et des jeunes pris en charge.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you, Speaker—a very short statement. By proclaiming May 14 each year as Children and Youth in Care Day, the province of Ontario recognizes the enormous contributions that current and former crown and society wards make to the province, as well as the strength, bravery and resilience shown by these children and youth in the face of adversity. Children and Youth in Care Day is an opportunity to raise awareness about children and youth under care of the province and to recommit to supporting them and helping them reach their full potential.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

YOUTH SERVICES

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I want to say that earlier today I was pleased to accept the report My Real Life Book from the Youth Leaving Care team, a courageous and talented group of young people committing to improving outcomes for youth in care when they leave the child welfare system. I want to thank these youth as

well as the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, Irwin Elman, for their hard work over—well, quite frankly, the past year.

One of my first official duties and privileges as Minister of Children and Youth Services was to attend last fall's hearings at Queen's Park organized by this team of young people with the support of the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. Attending these hearings gave me a deep appreciation for the challenges youth in care face, both while receiving child welfare services and when they age out of care. We heard it loud and clear throughout these hearings: Youth in care feel left out of the decisions that affect them. They feel left out of their own lives. They need a stronger voice.

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The report that these talented youth have produced is without precedent. It is groundbreaking and it is brave. It draws from the real-life experiences of youth previously and currently in the care of children's aid societies, experiences that in many cases have been extraordinarily difficult. The report is evidence of just how valuable it is to hear from youth who have lived these experiences about what it's going to take to improve our system and make lasting change.

Mr. Speaker, we owe these kids our sustained attention, yes. But most of all, we owe them our respect, we owe them action, and that is what we are doing today.

A short time ago, when I received their report, I was proud to announce that we were taking action on the number one recommendation emerging from this report. I am directing my ministry to bring together a working group made up of youth with experience living in care, along with partners from across the province, to determine how best to ensure a stronger voice for the youth themselves, at both the government and the children's aid society levels, and to create an action plan to improve the outcomes for children and youth in care.

Mr. Speaker, we need these youth to contribute their experiences to the decision-making process. They have demonstrated, through this report, the value of their unique expertise and their powerful insights into the experience of living in care. These youth have proven that they are powerful advocates for the well-being of their fellow children and youth in care. They have been a powerful voice for the vulnerable.

I'm also pleased to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that action is being taken on another recommendation brought forward by these youth in their report. My colleague the member from Windsor West, to my right, has just introduced—we just heard a private member's bill to designate May 14 of each year as Children and Youth in Care Day.

We know there is much, much more work still to do. My ministry will carefully review all of the report's recommendations to determine how we can further strengthen the child welfare system together.

I'd like to thank the Youth Leaving Care team for their hard work and their courage in making their voices heard. Your government shares your commitment and your aspirations. Together, we will build on the progress

we have made to further help young people in care successfully transition to adulthood.

Mr. Speaker, we know how important stability is to children and youth who have experienced upheaval in their lives, and it's why recent changes were made to enable crown wards whose care ended when they were 16 or 17 to return to their CAS and receive the financial and other supports they need until age 21.

We also know that a good education and the right supports are key to success down the road, and it's why we provide tuition grants, crown ward education championship teams and we exempt Extended Care and Maintenance financial support from OSAP calculations. Also, current and former youth in care can complete post-secondary or vocational training.

I'm proud of the progress that we've made and the supports that we've enhanced, but as I said, there is much, much more work ahead of us. With the support of partners like the Youth Leaving Care team and the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, we can and we will do even more to help children and youth in Ontario reach their full potential.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Responses?

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Thank you to the Minister of Children and Youth Services, and a particular thank you to the youth in care who have contributed so much to this conversation over the last several months.

I am honoured to rise in the Legislature today on behalf of the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus and our leader, Tim Hudak, and speak to the release of this report.

These two eye-opening days were enabled by Irwin Elman, Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. He is certainly to be commended for his role, but he would also acknowledge that the greater honour must go to the young people who organized this event. It is their vision and energy that saw it through to this moment.

The hearings have opened up an invaluable process that has yet to reach a conclusion. These young people hold on to their belief that everything will turn out all right in the end. In moments of shared vulnerability, these young people show profound optimism, uncommon strength and ambition.

As these hearings proved and this report reinforces, children and youth can't just help us make better decisions, but they can often make better decisions than we can. We must become better listeners. Certainly from a front-line perspective, their experience is startlingly clear. Read this report, talk to them, as I have, and you will learn of the painful limitations of the government status quo; and worse, the corrosive effects of a system that often shuffles youth through homes and schools so frequently they're barely able to know which way is up, let alone to put down the roots needed for emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual growth.

At the time of the Youth Leaving Care hearings, the province of Ontario was the legal guardian of 8,300 young people living in foster homes, group homes, transitional housing or other settings. About 40 individuals

and groups made presentations at the hearings. Their take on the street-level impact of public policy was a powerful eye-opener.

Studies have shown, and the young people tell us, that when crown wards transition out of care, they don't do as well as other young adults. They're less likely to finish high school, pursue post-secondary education or even earn a living wage. They're more likely to spiral into poverty, homelessness, mental health issues, challenges and entanglement in the justice system.

Entitled *My Real Life Book*, this document is both a report on the state of the system—of this government's level of care, occasionally its lack of care—and a road map of potential solutions, solutions that would make a world of difference in the lives of those who are, in effect, children of the state. It reflects the life experiences and real-world recommendations of youth in care.

These hearings were a phenomenal event. They were an unprecedented undertaking and an achievement in which all of those involved should take great pride. In my discussions with them, I sensed that the experience had already transformed them in ways that they hadn't expected, and those conversations affected me in ways I hadn't expected. We must use these insights to find a better way forward.

As I've said before, we can make real progress by seeing clearly, thinking creatively and asking critical questions rather than believing that funding alone is a solution. We have a moral obligation to youth in care to make sure that they get the best possible start, despite what can sometimes be the worst possible circumstances. In the words of one courageous young woman, "I would give anything for one month when I didn't have to be in survival mode every second of every day."

As a mother of five wonderful children who inspire me daily, I get my sense of self-worth when I look into their eyes, and I understand the gravity of that relationship. While government can never take the place of a parent, it aspires to do so for youth in care. I know in my heart that we can do better, and as these hearings and these reports have made clear, we must do better.

Miss Monique Taylor: Today I'm honoured to be able to stand and speak to 8,300 youth in our province. And they're not just any youth; they're crown wards and children who have found themselves in our child welfare system through no fault of their own. Some have faced trauma, death of family members, abuse of all types. They are known as our youth in care.

When I was first elected and was spending the very first of my days as an MPP, I was invited to a set of hearings being held here at Queen's Park. They were the Youth in Care hearings. I was not exactly sure what I was attending, but all the same, I went and sat in to listen. Wow, it was a true eye-opener of what I was to face as the new critic for children and youth services. What I heard was children and some young adults telling the stories of what had been happening in their lives as children in care. With the assistance of the child advocate's office, these young people were able to come

together and share what life had dealt them and what they felt needed to change to make life better.

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The hearings were two days of life stories, both good and bad; unfortunately, more bad than good. There were those who just spoke of their lives, while others recited poetry, sang songs that they had created, danced and performed theatre, all reflecting the emotions that they had not been able to otherwise express.

I cried and I smiled through tears. It was emotional for all adults in the room to hear how the system was failing.

Some of these kids, some who are now adults, had been through 30 homes while others had found a forever home in the first placement. But the most telling story overall was that this system was broken and had let many of them down.

The main purpose of the hearings began with the Extended Care and Maintenance program. Currently, the legislation states that at the age of 18, they are no longer a crown ward or under the supervision of this province. They're on their own. They're able to apply for ECM to assist with their financial needs until the age of 21.

Well, Mr. Speaker, as you and I and most of the people in this room know, at age 21, most children are not leaving home. Some are still in school. They do not have jobs and are not mentally ready to face the world on their own. In actuality, most people are not leaving home until their late 20s.

Kids in care are no different. They are not ready to leave at 21. They still need supports to help them manage. Raising the age of Extended Care and Maintenance to 25 would give them a chance to finish school, to better prepare to take on life's challenges as an adult.

Remember, Mr. Speaker, that the province of Ontario is the only parent to most of these youth. So when they are cut loose, it's forever. There's no one to call when the car breaks down, when they run out of money and they can't pay the rent, when they just need some guidance or advice. Quite simply, there's no one else in a lot of these kids' lives.

Today, the full report from the youth hearings has been handed over to the Minister of Children and Youth Services, as well as to both the member from Burlington and myself as the critics for children and youth services.

The report is specific in what it asks for. If I go through all of them, I know I'm going to run out of time, but the number one recommended action is for the fundamental change to be developed by November of this year, and the report kindly helps meet that target by offering an interim deadline, that is, within 60 days of today, for the naming of a working group to create the action plan.

I was really pleased to hear that the minister committed to fulfilling that recommendation, and I look forward to working in whatever way I can to help us get there.

The report also called for the declaration of Children and Youth in Care Day, and I'm pleased again that a

private member's bill is being brought forward to the Legislature. I am more than willing to support that.

I want to commend and congratulate all the youth involved in the creation of My Real Life Book, led by the Youth Leaving Care team of Shanna, Rasheeda, Wendy and Oneil. They have painted a picture that cannot be ignored. They are expecting us, as adults in their lives, to make sure we get it right. They're counting on us, Mr. Speaker, and together we need to make sure that their voices are not only heard but acted on, and we cannot let them down.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would like to thank all the members for their comments.

I would also like to personally welcome the Minister of Transportation to the House. Thank you for being here.

PETITIONS

WATER QUALITY

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd also like to recognize the grade 10 students from Bowmanville High School. Welcome.

The petition I'm presenting is from my riding of Durham, and it's from Eva and Harri Sagur, who have a bed and breakfast in my riding. The petition reads as follows:

"Whereas under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, Ontario regulation 319/08, public health inspectors are required to undertake risk assessments of small drinking water systems;

"Whereas many of these small drinking water systems are located in homes operating bed and breakfasts in rural Ontario;

"Whereas private homes that are the sites of bed and breakfasts already have potable drinking water used by the homeowners and their families every day;

"Whereas many of these bed and breakfasts have established the quality of their drinking water through years of regular testing;

"Whereas these home-based businesses are facing high costs to comply with the new requirements of regulation 319/08;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health amend Ontario regulation 319/08 to give the testing track record of a small drinking water system greater weight in the risk assessment process;

"Furthermore we, the undersigned, ask that bed and breakfasts operated within a private home with a drinking water supply meeting all the requirements of a private home not be subject to regulation 319/08."

I'm pleased to sign and support it, and present it to page William.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, I have a number of petitions to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas subsection 6(2)8 of the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act identifies dental hygienists as persons deemed to be qualified to operate an X-ray machine; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in independent practice need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

"We, the dental hygienists in independent practice, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by the member from Richmond Hill that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act and bring it to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I fully support these petitions, Mr. Speaker, sign them and pass them on to page Carley.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: This petition reads:

"Whereas the report from Ontario's Auditor General on the province's air ambulance service, Ornge, found a web of questionable financial deals where tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars have been wasted and public safety compromised; and

"Whereas Ornge officials created a 'mini-conglomerate' of private entities that enriched former senior officers and left taxpayers on the hook for \$300 million in debt; and

"Whereas government funding for Ornge climbed 20% to \$700 million, while the number of patients it airlifted actually declined; and

"Whereas a subsidiary of Ornge bought the head office building in Mississauga for just over \$15 million and then leased it back to Ornge at a rate 40% higher than fair market rent; and

"Whereas the Liberal Minister of Health completely failed in her duty to provide proper oversight of Ornge; and

"Whereas the latest scandal follows the eHealth boondoggle where over \$2 billion in health dollars were wasted; and

"Whereas current committees of the Legislature have no ability to subpoena witnesses;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government of Ontario immediately appoint a special all-party select committee to investigate the scandals surrounding Ornge."

I affix my signature in support.

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'ai cette pétition qui me vient de partout en Ontario.

« Attendu que la mission du commissaire aux services en français est de veiller à ce que la population reçoive en français des services de qualité du gouvernement de l'Ontario et de surveiller l'application de la Loi sur les services en français;

« Attendu que le commissaire a le mandat de mener des enquêtes indépendantes selon la Loi sur les services en français;

« Attendu que contrairement au vérificateur général, à l'ombudsman, au commissaire à l'environnement et au commissaire à l'intégrité qui, eux, relèvent de l'Assemblée législative, le commissaire aux services en français relève de la ministre déléguée aux services en français;

« Nous, soussignés, demandons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario de changer les pouvoirs du commissaire aux services en français afin qu'il relève directement de l'Assemblée législative. »

Je suis en accord. Je vais y apposer ma signature et je demande à Sabrina de l'amener à la table des greffiers.

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HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Jim McDonnell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry generates \$2 billion of economic activity, mostly in rural Ontario;

"Whereas more than 60,000 Ontarians are employed by Ontario's horse racing and breeding industry;

"Whereas 20% of the funds generated by the OLG slots-at-racetracks program is reinvested in racetracks and the horse racing and breeding industry, while 75% is returned to the government of Ontario;

"Whereas the OLG slots-at-racetracks program generates \$1.1 billion a year for health care and other spending, making it the most profitable form of gaming in the province for OLG;

"Whereas the government has announced plans to cancel the slots-at-racetracks program, a decision that will cost the government \$1.1 billion per year and threatens more than 60,000 jobs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Call on the government of Ontario to protect the \$1.1 billion of revenue the government received annually because of the OLG slots-at-racetracks program; direct OLG to honour the contracts with racetracks and protect

the horse racing and breeding industry by continuing the OLG slots-at-racetracks revenue-sharing program.”

I agree with this, and I will be signing it.

REPLACEMENT WORKERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Nickel Belt.

“Whereas strikes and lockouts are rare: on average, 97% of collective agreements are negotiated without work disruption; and

“Whereas anti-temporary replacement workers laws have existed in Quebec since 1978; in British Columbia since 1993; and successive governments in those two provinces have never repealed those laws; and

“Whereas anti-temporary replacement workers legislation has reduced the length and divisiveness of labour disputes; and

“Whereas the use of temporary replacement workers during a strike or lockout is damaging to the social fabric of a community in the short and the long term as well as the well-being of its residents;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to enact legislation banning the use of temporary replacement workers during a strike or lockout.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Andrew to bring it to the Clerk.

MARKDALE HOSPITAL

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Grey Bruce Health Services’ Markdale hospital is the only health care facility between Owen Sound and Orangeville on the Highway 10 corridor;

“Whereas the community of Markdale rallied to raise \$13 million on the promise they would get a new state-of-the-art hospital in Markdale;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care announce as soon as possible its intended construction date for the new Markdale hospital and ensure that the care needs of the patients and families of our community are met in a timely manner.”

I support this petition, will affix my name and send it with page Safa to the desk.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Val Caron and Hanmer, in my riding.

“Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry generates \$2 billion of economic activity, mostly in rural Ontario,” including Nickel Belt;

“Whereas more than 60,000 Ontarians are employed by Ontario’s horse racing and breeding industry;

“Whereas 20% of the funds generated by the OLG slots-at-racetracks program is reinvested in racetracks and the horse racing and breeding industry, while 75% is returned to the government of Ontario;

“Whereas the OLG slots-at-racetracks program generates \$1.1 billion a year for health care and other spending, making it the most profitable form of gaming in” Ontario;

“Whereas the government has announced plans to cancel the slots-at-racetracks program, a decision that will cost the government \$1.1 billion” and 60,000 jobs;

“We ... petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario ... to protect the \$1.1 billion of revenue the government received annually because of the OLG slots-at-racetracks program; direct OLG to honour the contracts with racetracks and protect the horse racing and breeding industry by continuing the OLG slots-at-racetracks revenue-sharing program.”

I agree with this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Talin to bring it to the Clerk.

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Mr. John O’Toole: I have another petition today from my riding of Durham, which reads as follows:

“Whereas the provincial government’s announcement regarding the eastward extension of Highway 407 indicates construction will end at Oshawa;

“Whereas ending the highway at Oshawa will mean undue traffic on smaller roads leading to Highway 407, while delaying the benefits of a completed Highway 407 for commuters, businesses, tourism, public transit and all stakeholders;

“Whereas the environmental assessment has not considered impacts of a partial completion of the highway; and

“Whereas the completion of the eastern extension of Highway 407 to Highway 35/115 is supported by citizens, businesses, communities and elected representatives;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the eastward extension of Highway 407 to Highway 35/115 in a single stage, as promised by the Dalton McGuinty government” several times “in previous infrastructure announcements. We request that Premier McGuinty respond with a commitment for the completion of Highway 407” on time, as specified initially.

I’m pleased to sign and support this, and present it to Gillian.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Sudbury.

“Whereas the Ontario government is making ... PET scanning a publicly insured health service...; and

"Whereas" since "October 2009, insured PET scans" are "performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with" the Sudbury Regional Hospital, now named Health Sciences North, "its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

"We ... petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through" Health Sciences North, "thereby serving and providing equitable access to the" residents "of northeastern Ontario."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Dia to bring it to the Clerk.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim McDonell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas industrial wind turbine developments have raised concerns among citizens over health, safety and property values; and

"Whereas the Green Energy Act allows wind turbine developments to bypass meaningful public input and municipal approvals;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of the Environment revise the Green Energy Act to allow full public input and municipal approvals on all industrial wind farm developments; and

"That the Minister of the Environment conduct a thorough scientific study on the health and environmental impacts of industrial wind turbines."

I agree with this petition and will be signing it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONG ACTION FOR ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR UNE ACTION ÉNERGIQUE POUR L'ONTARIO (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 10, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 55, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): When this government order was last called, we heard from the member for Durham. Now we're going to move to questions and comments with respect to the presentation from the member for Durham.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I had an opportunity, although I was not in the House—I was watching part of his speech on the television in my office when the member spoke. As always, he spoke eloquently and well about the pitfalls of Bill 55. But then he, to the surprise of no one—and I'm not doing this; I'm just commenting about it—called for an end to the debate and the end of the House for the day. He said something in there that I think was poignant as well. It was because he was frustrated, and I think that, because he feels that voices from the opposition are not being listened to, he felt compelled to say that and to try to end the debate and the House sitting for the day.

What he had to say was that he found it frustrating. He found that the government wasn't listening and that the government wasn't paying attention to what he had to say. But I want to assure him, for those of us who were watching on the television, for those of us who were here in the House—we listened intently to what he had to say, because he does bring a very unique style and a very unique talent, especially around economic issues, to what is said each and every day in this House.

I don't want the member to be frustrated; I don't want the member to think that his only avenue is the actions which precipitate the ringing of the bells, because we would, in this House, I think, very much like to hear more of what he has to say, particularly on economic issues; and I do believe, although I am not always in total agreement with the positions taken by those in the official opposition, that they have much to say around these issues and other issues, and that the people of Ontario who sent all of us here need to have our voices heard, but more importantly, they need to have them listened to.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to rise today to respond to the speech from the member. I'm not quite sure, after three or four days, exactly what was said and whether there was any merit in it or not, but I'll take this member's message that there was.

I'd like to say what this government has done to improve the business competitiveness of Ontario. Our tax plan for jobs and growth has positioned Ontario as one of the most attractive locations in the industrial world for new business investment. Forbes magazine ranked Canada as the best country for business, crediting Ontario's reformed tax structure as one of the key factors. KPMG ranked Toronto as the second-cheapest major city in North America in which to do business.

Since 2009, Ontario has moved from having one of the highest provincial corporate income tax rates to the fourth lowest in Canada. The general corporate tax rate has fallen from 14% to 11.5% and will continue to fall to 10% once the budget is balanced in 2017-18. The corporate income tax rate for manufacturing, processing, mining, logging, fishing and farming has been reduced from 12% to 10%. The small business corporate income

tax has been reduced from 5.5% to 4.5%, and the small business deduction surtax has been eliminated, as everyone knows, which extends the lower CIT rate to growing small businesses. The HST removes the embedded sales taxes, providing additional savings to businesses.

We see the results. In March and April, Ontario created 38,000 new jobs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I too want to add some comments with regard to the presentation of my colleague from Durham. Just before the House rose last week, he concentrated, to a great extent, on comments by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. The chamber is bringing up the fact that the government of the day has not done what it touts it has done vis-à-vis innovation. Innovation is basically the grist for the mill that is going to turn Ontario around, and not until we become more innovative are we going to find ourselves in the position that we want to be.

We heard on Friday that unemployment had risen now to 7.8% in the province of Ontario. That was particularly what my friend from Durham was predicting when he spoke on Thursday. Not that he presents himself as being a prophet, but it's pretty obvious. When people like Roger Martin, also quoted by the member from Durham—says in his report, “Ontario’s manufacturers shed 300,000 jobs. While the hemorrhaging has stopped, there is no evidence that these jobs will be coming back soon,” he’s referring to exactly the same thing.

We know, Speaker, and I said this in my own presentation a week ago, that the budget of Ontario is founded on some principles that we in the Progressive Conservative Party do not agree with, and I’m using a very muted way of putting that point across.

They’re talking about austerity and spending \$2 billion more than they did last year—hardly austerity where I come from. In terms of the job numbers, I talked about percentages, but the fact of the matter is, nearly 600,000 Ontarians at this point don’t have any jobs at all—men and women who want to work, who want to supply the bread for their family, put meals on the table and pay for the mortgage or the rent and don’t have the opportunity to do so.

It is for the government of the day to take responsibility for that. That’s what my friend from Durham said, that’s what I say and that’s what our party says.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Davenport.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Thank you, Speaker. I’m pleased to stand and rise on Bill 55 and to call attention to folks watching at home today and folks in the chamber that there are some real problems in this bill.

Buried in Bill 55 are some changes that are drastically going to affect the future of this province and the country when it comes to the environment, and I want to highlight that. I think people are well aware that the federal government right now does not understand the

importance of environmental protection. They barely acknowledge that climate change even exists. But people tend to think more of the provincial government here, that they have an understanding of and appreciation for the environment, which is why it’s surprising and really upsetting to see that a lot of environmental protection is going to be gutted in Bill 55.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: That’s not true.

Mr. Jonah Schein: It is true. Look at it. It’s absolutely true.

If you look at this, we are weakening environmental regulation here. What Bill 55 does is it amends very significant laws that are administered by the Ministry of Natural Resources. The ministry is already drastically underfunded. The Environmental Commissioner has said that we barely have the resources to protect the environment as is.

In fact, this goes further. The laws that are at risk here include the Endangered Species Act, the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, the Public Lands Act, the Crown Forest Sustainability Act and the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act. All of these are being undermined.

I think what’s most troubling is to see that we’re looking at the environment not in terms of protection but mostly just about cost savings. I think it’s time Ontarians knew that we’re blessed in Ontario to have such incredible natural resources. If we don’t protect it, we have no environmental future and we have no future on this planet. But there are also economic costs to neglecting the environment.

We need to have this discussion about the environment in Bill 55 and to pull these things out so that we can have a proper debate and discuss this further.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the member for Durham for his reply.

Mr. John O’Toole: Yes, thank you very much. I’d like to thank the members from Beaches–East York, Ottawa–Orléans, Thornhill and Davenport.

It’s a good reminder, as we start the debate this afternoon, that this bill is 327 pages long. It has 69 schedules and amends over 50 pieces of legislation. This is an omnibus bill. I’d be very suspicious of it, and remain that way.

The other speakers have all commented, I think quite honestly—and I’ve tried to refer to third party commentators, and I’m going to conclude my remarks by looking at the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. This is what they have to say about it. We know that the Canadian Council of Chief Executives is none other than John Manley, present chief executive officer and a former finance minister of Canada. What he says here, in an open letter to Finance Minister Duncan, is, “The single most important thing you could do to secure the future of the province is to rally your caucus and the population of Ontario” and declare a war on the provincial debt before it’s too late.

There you have it, by an independent executive person with a great deal of insight into the economy of Canada and, you might say, Ontario, telling Dalton McGuinty and Dwight Duncan, the Premier and his finance minister, to deal with the debt. The cost of debt now is about \$10 billion-plus annually of money that doesn't go to service. The third most expensive spending in Ontario is to service the debt, and it's growing. Even Don Drummond told them that if they don't do something, the debt is going to double and the deficit is going to go to \$30 billion.

Interjection: Shameful.

Mr. John O'Toole: This is a shameful response from a government that doesn't realize that Ontario is on the precipice of a cliff.

I know that our critic Mr. Shurman has spoken frequently on this—it's alarming—and even in question period, and yet they're asleep at the switch.

Unemployment in Ontario is growing, and that's a symptom of a deeper disease.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings to announce that there has been more than six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader indicates otherwise.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, we wish this debate to continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I call for further debate. The member for Essex.

M. Taras Natyshak: Merci, monsieur le Président. Comme toujours, ça me donne un grand plaisir et c'est un honneur de me tenir debout dans cette Chambre afin d'ajouter mes commentaires à ce débat.

As always, it is an honour to be here on behalf of the residents of my riding, Essex, to add my commentaries and what I've been hearing about the budget, titled G55, the Strong Action for Ontario Act.

I guess I'll start with a little bit of a history lesson. I got here in October, as all of the brand new members did, of course. It seems like a long time ago, at this point. But our eyes were quickly opened quite widely to the nature of the operations in this place. One of the things that struck me was indicated to me by my predecessors: Things don't really happen too quickly here. That became all too apparent in the early months of the life of this House, this minority government. I will remind the viewers of TV today: We are in a minority setting, something that hasn't happened in the Ontario Legislature for quite some time. What that meant is that we all knew that there was going to have to be a tone of compromise, a tone of collegiality, where ideas were respected, and ultimately implemented, not only for the benefit of this Legislature, but because that was the will and the mandate given to this government: to take other ideas than had been previously implemented in the past eight years of their majority tenure.

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So here we are in a minority setting—new members, new ideas—and we're ready to get to work here. One of the more fundamental aspects of this Legislature is the striking of committees, one of the things that actually is necessary to allow this House to work. Ultimately, what we found was that, right from the outset, the government side was unwilling to compromise in the striking of committees, which therefore led to months and months of negotiation back and forth. I'll simply say that they finally came to their senses and struck a little bit of a balance on committees, where it was representative of the actual distribution of seats in the House, where the government side no longer had the majority in committees, which meant that those ideas could then pass through this House in first and second reading, get amended if need be and come back as bills that were well nuanced and worked out.

One of the things that happened during those debates was that we missed an opportunity, maybe by design, to discuss the nature of the future of this province, and no more important than the nature of the budget, which we believe not only is an exercise in austerity—my colleagues to the right of me may disagree, but New Democrats certainly see it as something that isn't moving us forward in a progressive way. But we also believe that the nature of the budget was preordained by Don Drummond, who was their expert financial analyst, their expert fiscal guru, from the Toronto Dominion Bank, who laid out a series of reforms that addressed costs, the costs and the nature of running the operations here in the province. In a business-like fashion, he strategically went through the operations, identified measures where he thought—solely him—that the government could do a better job, potentially, or could cut costs.

We respect the fact that that is an important exercise, and I don't think there's a member in this House who doesn't think that we have to evaluate the operations from time to time and to ensure that we are doing everything that we can in the most efficient and effective way. Yet, because we didn't have functioning committees, we missed an opportunity to take the recommendations from Don Drummond, we missed the opportunity to do pre-budget consultations through the Standing Committee on Finance, to bring those ideas to the people on the ground, in our ridings, in this province. It is a massive failure right from the outset in terms of ensuring that we've gotten all the best ideas, that we've gotten a fully articulated vision of what the people in this province need.

Of course, we are concerned about rising costs. We're concerned about the debt that this province carries, not only our budgetary debt but our ongoing fiscal debt. And it's particularly difficult to take the recommendations of one individual on such an important aspect of the future of this province seriously. We understand that he's a professional, and he certainly had the resources at his disposal. But that exercise, as it was, again, missed the whole point. You're not doing this for a select group. You're not carving out one aspect—or you should not,

rather, carve out one aspect of the operations and focus on that solely. There is a large segment of people in this province that had some input, valuable input, to make to the budget discussions, which really was neglected. And here we are today, with a large portion of the debate missing.

In that light, Mr. Speaker, New Democrats identified that things were going off the rails quite quickly and that we had an active role to play. One of those roles was not only to evaluate the budget, this bill, G55, and also the budget motion, the declaration from the government, specifically the Minister of Finance, on his intentions and the government's intentions, but we took our ideas and delivered them to the people, but also listened. We did a little bit of a road trip. I know that my colleague from Beaches–East York came down to my riding, Essex, and also into the Windsor ridings, the neighbouring ridings. We had some good, frank discussions with stakeholders, not only from labour but business, the chambers of commerce, agriculture, rural representatives, folks who were passionate about environmental issues, and small business representatives. We had a really great gamut of input on those particular discussions. I know that he carried them around Ontario to different ridings. We were able to develop some really clear ideas, coming from the people.

That's why I think, when we presented our amendments—amendments that, I will add, were made in a respectful way; amendments that we believed were pragmatic and responsible—they were genuine, because they weren't only coming from us; they were coming, again, from the people of the province. It's a role that we took seriously, but it's a role that we believe the official opposition missed an opportunity on. I can only surmise that the reason they didn't add any input or didn't pressure the government to make any formal amendments was because they ultimately agreed with the vast majority of the content of this bill. That's the only conclusion I can come to: that the cost-cutting measures and tax-cutting measures for the select few and the exercises in privatization were actually exercises that the opposition side agreed with and would actually like to see.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, we were able to add some amendments that we think not only will help but were widely popular, one of them being a modest 2% tax increase to those in Ontario who make over \$500,000 a year. I would say that even two years ago this type of amendment wouldn't be as widely accepted as it is today because it has been sacrosanct to talk about the rich in this country and that we shouldn't ask them to do their part; we shouldn't be targeting them. But lo and behold, the nature of our economy has changed, where people are starting to understand that everyone has to do a part, everyone has to play their part, and those who have been benefiting the most, particularly in the toughest of times—maybe the laws have allowed them to escape some of the wrath of a massive downfall in our economy relatively unscathed. Why is that? Because we have, over

the years, protected those in that income bracket and insulated them from what we've all felt on the ground as the middle class in this province for decades. So we presented a modest idea, widely supported by 78% of the people in this province.

It seems as though it has taken, because it's one of the measures in this massive omnibus bill that we see the government has actually listened to. We applaud them for doing that. It's one of the reasons why we indicated that we were not going to force an election on this, because we saw that the government had a little inkling to infuse some fairness, albeit a New Democratic proposal, into the budget. There are other issues where we are happy that they have taken our ideas.

However, the vast majority of this bill is, as I said, an exercise in austerity. It is also an exercise that we would raise some red flags around. One of them is the privatization of ServiceOntario. We all are familiar with the nature of the Ornge helicopter scandal that has happened in this province, and I'll tell you about it.

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Here's what's happened. The delivery of air ambulance services was outsourced to a private entrepreneur who saw an opportunity to take this service and turn it into, potentially, a lucrative money-making venture where it was not ever designed or should not ever have been designed for that reason. Lo and behold, the actual service delivery plan and the model was brokered in the backrooms of this Legislature by insiders who knew the workings, who knew all of the mechanisms and were able to not only skirt some of the oversight that would have potentially stopped this, but also benefitted personally from devising these types of schemes.

We see that happening again. After all the lessons that we think the government should have learned by now, we see it happening again. Schedule 28 creates a new act, the Government Services and Service Providers Act, 2012. It's a new piece of legislation that opens the doors to privatization of ServiceOntario and any other services provided by the Ministry of Government Services. This could be Ornge times 100 because, first, it enables the creation of a holding company, similar to Ornge Peel and all the various spinoffs that we saw coming out of Ornge, and a network of for-profit or non-profit subsidiaries, and secondly, because it enables the private sector to leverage a public asset—for example, renewing your health card—into private profit by trying to get you to buy additional products provided by a subsidiary or new entity.

Here we are again; we're heading down the same road under the full sanction of this government. You would think that they would have learned their lesson, but yet they have not: one of many really cautionary tales that we offer in this House today, that I have the pleasure to offer in this House, in trying to have the members of that side really take a look at what's in this budget, because if you don't want to get yourselves in trouble again, you may want to take this portion out.

Number two, and here's another part that I've been fortunate enough to particularly focus on: The Minister

of Finance, I think single-handedly, under the advice of the head of the OLG, has made the decision to eliminate the slots-at-racetracks program. So, under the guise of a new revenue stream for health care and education and all of these wonderful social programs that they seem to want to tout themselves as being the protectors of, here's what they're doing. In eliminating that program, which runs around a \$345-million cost structure each and every year, what they are doing is, they are going to kill 60,000 jobs in the province of Ontario. And for what reason? I can only surmise that they see a massive cash grab, a \$345-million bag of money that they want to access quickly, a one-time hit, to pay down—you know what? That will pay for Ornge operations for a year and a half, or maybe it will pay for a third of a boondoggle of a gas plant in Oakville. They need that money. We know they need it because of all the failures that they've made in years previous and also for some of the ongoing failures that we see.

But what they're doing is, they are eliminating a very lucrative and beneficial plan that helps support rural Ontario and jobs in rural Ontario. For what? Why would you dismantle, destroy, a wonderful industry that has been self-sufficient? That was never any of your money. There was not one dollar of public coffer money that went into that program. It was all generated through revenue from the racetrack, from the slot machines that were actually placed into the horse racing facilities to support horse racing, not the other way around. But you're going into that without any regard—no consultation with the industry, no care for rural Ontario. We can only surmise that it's because you're so inept at the financial management of the province that you are willing to do that without any regard.

This adds \$1.1 billion to our provincial coffers each and every year. So it's a \$345-million program that adds \$1.1 billion to your coffers. Why would you ever want to dismantle that? What sense does it make?

Again, I can only surmise that the actions we see in schedule 28, where privatization reigns supreme in the delivery of services, is the mantra you're putting on the delivery of the OLG. You ultimately want to privatize all aspects of our lottery facilities here in the province. It is a recipe for failure, Mr. Speaker, not only for those workers but for the breeders in this province, who are already making investments four years out. We have article upon article—one in the Guelph Mercury—quotes from breeders who made substantial investments.

I'll point to a small victory that I had this week in Windsor, in my riding, by shining some light on one of the absolutely boondoggled aspects of our OLG, where this province was actually sanctioning the promotion of a casino in Cleveland, Ohio, through sending out promotional materials to rewards participants through Caesars casino, which is a public-private entity—that's a P3 there. You guys over there have to raise some flags here, because you're privateers as well. If you want to be sincere about protecting the industry, then you've got to step up to the plate. If you want to protect it, then own it. Don't shift the responsibility.

Here is what Caesars was doing. They were sending out promotional material saying, "Come and gamble at the Horseshoe Casino Cleveland," when we were laying off workers at the Caesars casino operation in Windsor—also particularly egregious in the sense that the Minister of Finance justified ending the slots in Windsor to protect the jobs at the casino in Windsor. Three days later, 27 layoffs, also coming on the tail of this notice. It was disgusting. I held a press conference on Friday morning in front of Caesars Windsor. Two hours later Caesars corporation issued a full apology, and I thanked them for that. I thanked them for coming to their senses. Even the finance minister came to his senses after the press conference and said it was a boneheaded move. Why, in fact, would he dismantle this entire industry? That's a boneheaded move.

Another thing the finance minister said was that investments at racetracks, in terms of the breeders and the owners, come primarily from American investors—they're American horses—yet he wants Americans to come and gamble at our casinos in Windsor. He wants them to do that, and maybe some will win, but he doesn't want Americans to come in and keep their horses at our tracks in Ontario. He says that the majority of that money goes back to the States, because there are some American breeders. Well, if the minister is that good at picking the ponies—because no one is guaranteed to win here. They may be American investors and American owners, but they're not guaranteed to win the race. If he's that good at picking the ponies, I would suggest he consider another profession. There is no way that those investments in our facilities don't have a massive return in dollars in our rural areas. They help local farmers with feed and farriers and veterinary services—all the services.

Mr. Speaker, it is a shame. There are so many issues in this budget that I could speak about, but those two, certainly the revenue side they have missed but also dismantling one of the most important industries for rural Ontario, are a shame, and I'm pleased to highlight those issues for the House today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to be responding to the member from Essex. His issues weren't quite the issues I've seen generally discussed here, so maybe I will just turn to some of the things we should look at that come from our 2012 budget.

The single most important step—we all agree on that; I've heard it from all the parties—is to balance the budget. We have a plan. Our party has a plan that will balance the budget in 2017-18. It's a five-year plan, and five years is going to be a tough period for the province of Ontario. But looking at our overall gains in employment since the major recession, looking at some of the things that we have been doing with the tax rates—the tough decision of the HST, which is in and which is producing the results that we expected—we're not only going for \$17.7 billion in savings, but we're going to

contain the cost increases. So there's \$17.7 billion in savings and \$4.4 billion in revenue-raising measures.

We are taking strong action to manage costs and transform public services, and that's going to need the support of this House. That's the next stage, that's the big stage in saving dollars. Rather than flash and burn, which has happened in the past, we are going to take a measured approach with that.

So, Speaker, I think that what we are doing here is the right action for Ontario. It will come up with jobs, come up with savings and will come up with a balanced budget in five years.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my privilege and pleasure to speak to the member from Essex. I generally find him a pretty balanced and well-informed new member; as he suggested, he has been here since October, the same as many of us. I agree with him on many of his points. The failure of the Liberals to even have pre-budget consultation: I mean, it's always talk and spin about "We want to work in collaboration," and, "We want to talk in partnership"—and Mr. Crack, I'm sure you'll agree with this—but, you know, at the end of the day, they didn't even set those up so we could have some truly substantive discussions.

Their lack of ability to make tough decisions: I think, again, we agree there. He talked about the debt and the need for the governing Liberals to get it under control. I think we both understand the reality, as in our own household. You can't continue to spend more than you bring in every day and not go off the cliff at some point. We're getting perilously close to going off of that debt cliff, yet they still didn't make the decisions in this budget to move this quickly. We can't take the eight years that they've taken to get us into this hole to get out. We need to take drastic action.

We do, however, sometimes have a differing of opinions. He made a comment about some of their ideas being wildly popular. One of my concerns, Mr. Speaker, is that the wildly popular ideas aren't necessarily what we need. It's easy to pander to the general public that will jump on board and say, "Yes, just go tax more people."

At the end of the day, I think you have to do things that are more substantive. We have to look at what's pragmatic and what's really going to turn this place around. We, fundamentally, as a PC caucus, went into the budget thinking that we have to reduce spending—it's out of control and there have to be drastic measures taken. We have to ensure that there's a jobs plan. If everybody is working in this province—there's 600,000 people unemployed—we'll be a prosperous province once again. We definitely have to reduce our debt. Some 50% of our costs are wages. We can't continue to add more government jobs. We need to set up the environment for a vibrant economy and let business drive our economy.

While I support many of his thought processes, I think there is a clear path between the Conservatives, the NDP and the Liberals.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: First of all, I'd like to thank the member from Essex for his presentation. He touched on a lot of areas where there are problems in this budget, but the one in particular that really sticks out is the horse racing industry.

I look at this, and if I was making an investment in the province—they called it a subsidy; actually it was a deal they cut, but that's besides the point. They put out over \$300 million, they said, to support the harness racing and flat racing, but they don't talk about the 75% they make; they don't talk about the \$1.2 billion they made.

They talk about job creation. They want to create jobs in our province. They want to help people who are out of work. So you're going to put 60,000 people out of work, plus all the secondary industries that support those industries, which will be another 30,000 or 40,000, so you're going to put 100,000 people out of work. In a lot of these situations, the people that are involved in racing, if they're third- and fourth-generation people, they aren't university grads a lot of them; this has been their life, this has been their income. It has been their family income—their farms, their investment. They put their whole lives into this, and this government doesn't take that into consideration.

They want to open two casinos, one in Toronto and one in Ottawa. Well, even the people don't want it. But they are going to close the ones where it's the lifeblood of the community. It just doesn't make sense.

They said the revenues are down. They only made \$100 million off those three tracks down there that they want to close; \$100 million isn't bad for one year. Now they're saying that the forecast was \$400 million they should have made, but they didn't. But we're in a recession, and a lot of Americans weren't coming over because their dollar was not as good as it used to be here. But those things could turn around and will turn around. But you don't go at it from the top up and hammer everybody at the bottom—social, people working, hard-working Ontarians; whether it is horse racing, whether it is steelworkers, whatever it is, from the bottom up.

This government has a tendency to work from the top down. They help everybody at the top. They hand out \$4 billion to industry that leaves after two years. They've got their priorities all screwed up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to have an opportunity this afternoon to speak in support of the government's Bill 55. The government has taken strong action in the 2012 budget to protect public education. As many of you know, I was a former school board trustee for the Toronto District School Board. There's one thing my constituents in Scarborough—Agincourt have consistently said to me: Public education is the most important thing

in terms of public services that Ontarians rely on. We have a plan to make sure our education is considered the best according to the OECD.

Our budget ensures that we will continue to have full-day kindergarten. Finally, everybody in this House agrees that full-day kindergarten is the best thing for our young students. We continue to maintain our classroom size to be small—

Interjection.

Ms. Soo Wong: You know, Mr. Speaker, there would be others who don't agree with full-day kindergarten. I can tell you from experience that full-day kindergarten is the best thing for our students. That's what this budget is about: ensuring that every student in Ontario is given an opportunity to succeed and an opportunity to learn. Our government also continues to allow the 30% reduction of Ontario tuition fees for families that make less than \$160,000, once again to ensure that students have access to post-secondary education who otherwise wouldn't be given the opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, we're here to ensure that our values of public education get across and are shared across the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before I give the member for Essex time to respond, I think I'll remind all members that questions and comments are intended to relate back to the original speech that was given.

I will now return to the member for Essex, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thanks to the members from Ottawa—Orléans, Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, Hamilton East—Stoney Creek and Scarborough—Agincourt, of course. I guess my speech here today was focused on what was missing. The revenue side of the equation is one of them. We've proposed some remedies for that: our modest tax increase on those making over \$500,000 a year and also a freeze on the corporate tax structure at 11.5%. We think those are good things.

We think that revenue from some operations, particularly the horse racing industry, is and can be a great addition to the operation and fiscal stability of this province. It adds the revenue that the member from Scarborough—Agincourt is asking for, for education and full-day kindergarten.

Those are things you need money for. Here was a wonderful program that not only provided good, tangible jobs that you can't outsource, you can't ship out of town, but also added sustainable revenue. Of course it suffered from some of the pressures that every enterprise did throughout the last recession, but it was there and continued to be there, and those investments continued to be made until you pulled the rug out from under them and dismantled the industry. You left them absolutely in chaos, and what you did to rural Ontario is a disaster.

I cannot wait to talk to the Minister of Agriculture, because he has not felt an ounce of heat on this. He has abdicated his responsibility to rural Ontario without even a whisper of the impact this decision is making. He has toed the line with the government. I don't know what his

thoughts are. He's trying to maintain his seat, but he should be in as much jeopardy—he should be feeling as much pressure and be in as much jeopardy as the members of the horse racing industry are with this decision. I am looking forward to talking to him about this as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

1430

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to stand in my place in the Legislature today to speak to the budget bill, Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts.

The budget presented in March 2012 is an important budget as it addresses very important matters for all Ontarians. I'll start with education. We've just heard, in one of the responses to the last speaker, the importance of education. We all know how important education is. This budget protects all the gains that have been made since 2003 in education. We have changed Ontario's position in the world education ratings to number one in the English world and the top five worldwide. And so this budget protects the class sizes. I know that wasn't what the Drummond report said, but we felt that that was extremely important.

By 2015, we will have completed full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds. This is extremely important as well. I've said in the House before that the first-hand knowledge with my oldest grandchild, that he will be completing his second year—his school got it the first year and so he will be completing it this year. Not only has he prospered as a kid—and he loves the school; we can't go by it any time without him pointing it out—but as well, he speaks French. He didn't speak French before. He went into full immersion and now he speaks French. There are so many things that children can learn in the grade 4 and grade 5 kindergartens that's not costing that much more than what it does under daycare. It's costing more, but in the end there will be a lot of results from that kind of education. It's something that I'm very proud our government has brought in, and I think probably brought in because of the women's caucus over with the Liberals—extremely important.

We're not going to go into our schools and slash and burn and get rid of a lot of teachers and a lot of support workers. We're not going to do that. If we followed the Drummond report with education, we not only would have forgone some of the major gains that we've made since 2003, but we would have had to let go of 20,000 of our young teachers and support workers. It would have robbed our children of a better education. It would have left 10,000 of our young teachers without jobs. That wouldn't be a positive thing to do. Not only the teachers, the young teachers who have difficulty getting that first job—not only would they have been in jeopardy, but our kids would have been as well without all the additional teaching.

Because of early intervention to help struggling students, because of recognitions of students' technical and

other strengths, the graduation rate of our high schools has increased from 68% to 83% in the last seven or eight years. And what that means is that there are 100,000 more Ontarians out there, kids—it's extremely important: 100,000 more kids are proud that they graduated from high school and they are pursuing careers and trades and are making a much greater contribution to this economy than they would have had they not graduated from high school. I think that is tremendously important: 68% up to 83% and about 100,000 kids now since the program was put in place a few years ago.

The children in our system benefit, 20,000 of the youngest teachers—mostly youngest teachers—benefit, the support workers keep their jobs and all the public workers in the education system share the pain. There's no doubt that there will be pain as Ontario moves forward to balance the budget in 2017-18. It's how do you balance what each of us as Ontarians gives up? As MPPs, we've extended the freeze on our salaries for five years. That's not too much of a hardship. If everyone does their share, it's going to be much better.

Health care was the second important issue that we had to protect as part of this budget. Since 2003, we've gone from the longest wait times in Ontario to the shortest. That's amazing, but that didn't come easily. That came about by the work of our doctors, our nurses, our other hospital workers. We're in a situation now where the health care system is providing much better services but the costs are going up too quickly. That's one of the things now: We have to go into health care and make sure that we can balance the budget in that five years but maintain the health system that has been built up over the last five or six years.

The budget for aging at home or the services for keeping people at home—that is so important. We all know what a bed in a hospital costs and how we can keep people in their homes, where they want to be. I go back to Alex Munter asking the question—there were 600 seniors at a meeting in Ottawa, and he asked the question, “How many of you want to end up in an acute-care bed in a hospital or in long-term care?” Of course, not one hand went up. So we know where people want to stay. It's a matter of making those improvements in the delivery of systems so they can stay in their homes. There are a lot of new ideas coming out and ideas that I've certainly pushed forward with the Ministry of Health.

Again, health care professionals at all levels will be expected to make sacrifices so that a better health care system results and we all do our share and reach that balanced budget in five years. That is mandatory. That has to be done, and we all have to share that. If we all do that, then we will end up with a very strong province.

The third area, with education and health care, where this budget and predecessor budgets have invested is, of course, jobs. When we brought in the harmonized sales tax, the federal Conservatives knew it was the right action to take. I'm not sure what the figure was, whether it was \$4.3 billion or \$2.3 billion—that's about three

years ago—but the federal government stepped up and gave Ontario those dollars, significant dollars, in order to make that transition. Everyone knew it was going to be a tough transition, but they knew it was essential. This gives our manufacturers in Ontario a level playing field when they market their goods in Canada and overseas. We did it for the right reason: to help Ontarians to create jobs. And what did the party opposite do? Did they care about making Ontario competitive? Not a bit. They knew it would not be popular and they ranted and raved against the legislation. It was the most difficult piece of legislation to get through, but it was necessary. We persevered, and in the end Ontarians have accepted it, our businesses have benefited from it and we are creating jobs—a net 38,000 jobs in the last two months. Conservatives were for it; then they were against it when the going got tough. We took the tough and proper action. Ontario is better for us toughing it out and getting the HST legislation in.

The year 2009 was the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression. We all know that. The Canadian dollar, in a few years, increased by 50%. Do you remember the 67-cent dollar? That's what we had. Now it's at parity with the US. Manufacturing switched to China and India. Our largest trading partner, the US, is in terrible economic distress as a result of wars, subprime mortgages and Republican debt. They had a balanced budget in 2000.

How is Ontario doing, in spite of all these pressures? Well, Speaker, we lost a lot of jobs in the recession, but since the bottom of the recession we have gained 300,000 jobs and, as I said, in March and April of this year, another 38,000, if you take the total and divide it by two.

These are tough times, and we must all be part of a solution to balance the budget. Our government has a plan. The Conservatives seem to support a freeze on wages and support what we're trying to do. We want to do it in a manner that we don't get challenged in the courts. We can make this a team effort and achieve a balanced budget, protect education and health care and continue to create jobs.

If you look at the economic situation for Ontario right now, if this minority government can bring outside the Conservatives, who want to see wages for public servants kept in check, we can all do it; we can succeed and meet that very important balanced budget.

1440

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: It's a privilege to get up and respond to our colleague from Orléans.

I think it was pointed out that our leader met last November with the leader of the government to put forth what we needed to do to support any budget. We talked about a control of spending and a jobs plan, and, of course, we saw neither.

When you're looking at a government that's got spending out of control, you're looking at—you know, they have no regard for public money. Look at Ornge, the

hundreds of millions of dollars—we're talking \$700 million wasted there; the cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga power plants—arguably another \$2 billion, and now a billion-dollar lawsuit against them for lost contracts; eHealth—another billion dollars. Just think of what we could do with that money.

We've got a government that doesn't know a good plan when they see it. We've got the horse racing industry that contributes over a billion dollars annually to this economy—not to this economy, but to this government's plans, and now that's cancelled. They contribute over another \$50 million to local municipalities; that will be gone. This is money that people in Ontario are freely giving, that's freely being turned back into the economy. Then we look at the 60,000 jobs that are gone as well. I mean, we're not only looking at a jobs program; we're looking at job losses.

We listened to the Auditor General's report, where they talk about health care waste, that 28% of health care is wasted. So I think it's very difficult to support a plan like this.

There's not a program that people in this House don't want. It's a matter of affordability and setting priorities, and this government is unable to do that. So we're looking at reasonable spending and bringing Ontario back to where it should be.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jonah Schein: Speaking to what the member from Ottawa—Orléans was saying just a few minutes earlier, and speaking to the budget bill, Bill 55, sometimes in this House I think we run the risk of lulling anybody who's out there to sleep on what's happening here in Ontario. Again, just to kind of raise some alarm bells about what is happening here: To me, we have put the fate of this province in the hands of a banker, who's the adviser. That might be good if you're investing in some stocks, but when you're looking after the environment, when you're looking after the future of public education or public health care, I think we should let people who understand those sectors participate. So when the member from Essex was earlier speaking about the lack of consultation on the budget process, this is exactly what we're seeing right now.

The member from Ottawa—Orléans was raving about the government's success in education. In fact, in Toronto we're losing tonnes of schools. There are hundreds of schools at risk of closure right now. Boasting about full-day child care, which of course we support—sorry, full-day kindergarten, which of course we support. Because of the way this program was implemented, we've seen a lack of child care spaces, and there are people who are struggling. This is a very serious issue. When people can't find child care for their family, they can't go to work. It's a crisis.

At the same time, this government has cut off some of the benefits to the most at-risk folks in this province. We didn't move ahead with supporting people, kids, with the Ontario child benefit this year, and so more kids are

going to school without having had breakfast, because their families couldn't afford to feed them in the morning.

The whole approach to this budget only looked at one side: It only looked at how to save money. It didn't talk about making the kinds of investments that would make this a fairer province going forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I only caught the last half of the speech by the member for Ottawa—Orléans, but I know the first half would have been as informative as the second half.

The facts of the matter are—I always look at the Stats Canada labour force analysis, which anybody can get from the research library—for March and April of this year, Ontario: in March, 46,000 full-time jobs; April, 23,000 full-time jobs. That's 69,000 in two months. That's quite a pace of full employment labour growth.

It was this party that made the decision to provide the transition dollars for both General Motors and Chrysler, significant players for Ontario's economy. Just last week, there was a study done for the United States government talking about the future of the auto sector in North America. In fact, that study indicated that we're going to run out of production capacity in North America because of the downturn in 2008-09. We have ramped production capacity back up, and as we get towards the latter part of the end of this decade, there is going to be a lack of capacity in North America to produce automobiles. Now there is talk within General Motors of taking that truck plant in Oshawa that's currently idle and perhaps bringing that back in production. They're looking at ways to expand the parts production here in North America. So one of the great pillars, the auto sector, seems to be moving ahead with great pace, with positive optimism.

OISE just recently did a study of the benefits of full-day kindergarten in the province of Ontario. That study clearly indicates that full-day kindergarten is the way to go to prepare those young students as they move from kindergarten into grade 1 and the rest of elementary school.

So many of the things that my colleague talked about are very positive things in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I thank my Conservative friends for not standing up.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay, thank you.

I listened intently, as I always do, to the member from Ottawa—Orléans, but you need to be more than a cheerleader to be in this place; you need to be more than just someone who says, "Rah, rah, rah," and talks about the government's successes over the past eight years, because along with those successes came many failures. Along with those came this budget.

One has to talk about the process that led up to this budget. This was the first budget in the modern history of Ontario where there were no committees that went out

and listened to ordinary people. This was the first time in the history of Ontario that ordinary people didn't have a say or an input into what went into the budget. There was only one person who had a say and that was Don Drummond. And even then, although the government talked about him and how he was going to be their guru and how he was going to do everything right, when the member spoke about him, he had to first of all admit that all of Don Drummond's recommendations were not met. Don Drummond stood there with a straight face and recommended to this government that they get rid of all-day kindergarten because they couldn't afford it. This government didn't do it.

Now, I'm not saying that that was the wrong thing to do, but you cannot stand there and put all of your eggs in the basket of Mr. Drummond and ignore all of the advice of ordinary Ontarians who had a great many good things to say and then say, "Fine, we did the right thing." The government has to decide: Are the people supreme here? Are the people the ones who we should be listening to, or is it Don Drummond? Because, obviously, you chose not to look at most of his recommendations. You cherry-picked a few out that you liked and you ignored the rest.

My Conservative colleagues think that that's a mistake because they want you to balance the budget sooner than you seem to want to do it, but I would say, on the other hand, it was a mistake because you have neglected to have a dialogue with the people who matter most: the ordinary people of Ontario who are, in part, going to be hurt by what you've done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I now return to the member for Ottawa—Orléans, who has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you to the members for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, Davenport, Peterborough and Beaches—East York.

We have a difference of opinion, of course, on how we're going to reach that end of the deficit in five years, 2017-18. We disagree on that. I would just say that the guidelines from the Drummond report were excellent to have, and we know that we have to change our course. We were able to manage the years after 2009, the significant recession, a very significant recession, when so many jobs were lost. We've managed that, and we're now going on to—we've done what other governments did. Our infrastructure spending saved I think it was 80,000 jobs in a report I saw. This was important; this was done. The federal government did it; we did it; municipalities did it. And, of course, as you get to the end of the recession, as you come out, you're looking for ways now to pay that back; you have to. We could have used slash-and-burn, and that slash-and-burn doesn't help anyone.

1450

We're moving forward in a very systematic, a very planned and a reasonable approach. I hope that the party opposite—to obtain the same reductions, you can do it by slash-and-burn or you can do it through negotiations or through legislation. I'm looking forward, as we move

down the line to put in place this budget—first of all, to pass it in this Legislature and then put it in place—that there is co-operation with the party opposite, that we will get a good plan together that will result in a prosperous Ontario in 2017-18, with a balanced budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate.

Mr. Michael Harris: I rise today to address Bill 55, the so-called Strong Action for Ontario Act.

You know, Mr. Speaker, here we have again another Liberal bill that has a fancy title but provides no leadership, no foresight and no plan for Ontario. It's the height of Liberal arrogance to think that they can table a budget without a blueprint for the future while disguising their future with a clever name that doesn't really reflect its reality. Providing Ontarians with a reversal of meanings at every turn comes naturally to the Liberal Party. Just review the title of almost every other bill they've brought forward.

We in the PC Party, however, believe that government needs to be honest with the Ontario public. That means calling a spade a spade. That means when the province is facing a crisis, the government must address what's wrong instead of pretending everything is okay.

I truly believe Ontario can lead again, can lead our country in job creation and economic growth once again. But to make that happen, our province requires prudent financial management, a visionary jobs plan and, most important, a government that does what it says and says what it does. If Bill 55 is proof of anything, though, it's that the Liberals are incapable of doing any of this.

First off, let's consider the Liberal government's claim that its budget will eliminate the deficit. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you right now that their budget does no such thing. How on earth can the Liberal government seriously think that anyone can believe they'll balance the books when the budget increases spending in 14 of 24 ministries?

After talking to many of my constituents, I know that as soon as anyone learns this fact, they no longer believe the Liberals, as do I. In fact, I remember speaking to a constituent of mine, Bob, who lives in St. Jacobs in my riding of Kitchener—Conestoga, last month about Bill 55. He asked me why the PC Party had chosen to reject the budget in its entirety. I first told him that the PC team went over the budget line by line, section by section, searching for any indication that this government was serious about fixing the mess they've created over the last eight years. But what we found was nothing more than Liberal doublespeak and more spending.

Once I let him know that Bill 55 actually increases spending by nearly another \$2 billion this year, Bob more than supported my decision to vote against the failed partisan budget. In fact, he was also encouraging me to let more people know the truth about this budget, and I have since so done that. That's my point. As soon as people can get access to the facts and get past the Liberal doublespeak, they can see that this budget in no way lives up to its name and fails to take the so-called strong

action. All Ontarians have is the Premier's word, and we all know what that's good for.

In previous elections, the Premier said one thing and, of course, did another. He raised taxes, let Ontario's hydro rates skyrocket and recklessly increased spending, all while promising the opposite. Now he has the province on a collision course with a \$30-billion deficit and a total debt burden of \$411 billion—and it gets even worse.

Last month, two major credit rating agencies told us we cannot afford to continue down this road. Right after the McGuinty budget passed its first vote, Standard and Poor's put the province on a negative credit watch. One day after that, Moody's downgraded the province's actual credit rating. We all know that the lower the province's credit rating is, the higher the interest rates will be on the province's debt, and when interest rates rise, more money will be diverted away from priorities like hospitals and schools. The fact is that just a 1% increase in interest rates would cost Ontario \$500 million. Do you know what that money could buy? Roughly 250,000 MRI exams.

We have got to change course because generations of Ontarians cannot afford to continue to bear this debt burden. Consider that today interest payments on the province's debt are now the third-largest expenditure behind health and education. That means that if interest payments were a government ministry, it would be Ontario's third-largest, worth more than \$10 billion. I can only think who would want to be the cabinet minister of that portfolio. When my party's leader recently met with a group of business leaders, he was told that Ontario needed to do three things to get our economy back on track: "First, rein in spending, balance your books and pay down your debt. Second, rein in spending, balance your books—and pay down the debt! And third, bring down taxes on businesses and entrepreneurs."

In a botched attempt to control the government's spending addiction, the Liberals have chosen to target teachers and doctors. This is not the right way to solve Ontario's debt crisis. All public sector workers need to do their part to ensure that Ontario can return to a more sound financial footing. That's why the PC Party has been calling on the government since last year to implement an across-the-board mandatory public sector wage freeze. This isn't about picking winners and losers, which the Liberals like to do, of course, so often with their corporate welfare schemes and green energy social experiments; this is about fairness and asking all public sector workers, whether they are a firefighter, police officer, teacher or doctor, to do their part to ensure Ontario can be great once again.

Addressing Ontario's debt crisis is only one part of the equation; we also need a serious, concrete jobs plan to get back to work the nearly 600,000 Ontarians looking for a job. Alarmingly, Ontario's unemployment rate has been higher than the Canadian average for 64 straight months. That's more than five years, which means that Ontario's job crisis began much before the recession. The

Premier has got to take some responsibility for the mess that he and his government have created. While things continued to worsen in the private sector under his watch, the Premier just ramped up public sector hiring. In fact, since 2003 the Liberals have increased the number of public sector positions by 23%, or 246,000 jobs. That's 40,000 more people than in the city where I live, Kitchener. And the Liberal government did this while the private sector grew just 5% over the same period.

Enough is enough. Ontarians don't want to hear any more excuses. They want strong action from their leaders. So while this government drifts, we in the PC Party will take strong action to restore Ontario as a leader of Confederation once again. That starts with creating the right environment for private sector investment. We in the PC Party want to make Ontario the best place to do business in Canada. We don't want companies to choose to go elsewhere in order to avoid excessive regulation and taxation here in Ontario. That's why we need to introduce more competitive business taxes and power up our economy by introducing solid policy proposals to help the nearly 600,000 out of work.

The PC Party would take immediate action to overhaul Ontario's outdated apprenticeship system and create over 200,000 new skilled jobs. In my riding of Kitchener-Conestoga I have met several young men and women looking to get a good-paying, quality job in the trades but can't because the apprenticeship-to-journeyman ratio is only 1 to 1. Business should be able to hire more young professionals looking to develop their careers.

Mr. Speaker, Ontarians understand the importance of budgeting. We all know we can't spend more than we take in today if we want to provide a future for our children tomorrow. I know that my young lad Murphy is watching on TV and he'll want us to be standing here talking about just that.

The same goes for small business.

Interjection: Twenty-one thousand dollars in debt.

Mr. Michael Harris: He's only three months old, so he's not quite there yet.

I want to go back to small businesses, because they realize that if they don't make enough profit to cover their expenses, they will go out of business. I'm sure we wouldn't mind getting that nice, shiny new car or big-screen TV or even a new iPad for the family at home. But we understand that putting these purchases on our credit card only delays the inevitable. Eventually, we have to pay up, and if we don't, the debt collector will be coming after us all. I hear Dog, the bounty hunter, is in fact looking to diversify his portfolio.

But this government obviously doesn't understand this principle. With each successive year, the Liberal government has managed to dig the province deeper into debt. Ontario needs a plan, Ontario needs real leadership, and most importantly, Ontario needs a government that understands that what we do today will shape our future.

1500

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank the member from Kitchener—Conestoga for his points as he touched on Bill 55, the budget.

I'd just like to go over some of the things that have happened in the last few years since I've been here. I remember when I first got here, Speaker, the Premier stood up and he said he was going to create 600,000 manufacturing jobs. Well, it didn't happen. He has downgraded it three or four times, and I don't know what we're at now.

He promised 50,000 green venture jobs—didn't happen. I don't think it's even anywhere near 5,000.

Then he signed the Samsung deal with Korea. When I asked for the details, they blacked out the entire contract on any money or any deals they had signed. Imagine that: A member of provincial Parliament asks for the details of a deal they signed with another country, and it's blacked out. What are you afraid of? Why won't you show the people and the opposition parties what's going on?

Then they blew \$388 million on an electronic health care system for the province. I dug around and found out what we got for that. We got about \$100 million worth of hardware, software, consultants and all the other things that we got. But they blew 60% of the budget on Liberal-friendly consultants—\$288 million. And we still don't have an electronic health care system for Ontario.

Then I heard the Conservatives talk about the ratio of tradesmen. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm a tradesman. They haven't said what ratio they'd like: 5 to 1, 6 to 1, 4 to 1? I haven't heard anything. When I do, then I can analyze it, because 1 to 1 has been around a long time. I know working on the tools, I had enough trouble keeping an eye on one apprentice let alone six apprentices or whatever they want. They'd better come out with more specifics. I've got a couple of trades, actually, and I'd like them to come and work for me for a day and work safely. If I had five apprentices, I don't know if I could keep an eye on all five and have them work safely. I think they'd better do a little more homework when it comes to trades and crafts because I don't really think they've got a handle on it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: It's my pleasure to give my feedback or response to the member for Kitchener—Conestoga. The member was talking about the need to create a strong economy in Ontario, a strong foundation for businesses. I want to really highlight that our government has been working on this for some time.

What we have seen again and again from the Conservatives, from the party of the member for Kitchener—Conestoga, is that when we brought in those measures, for example, if you focus on taxation, the party opposite always voted against them.

When we brought in the harmonization of sales taxes, the GST and PST, which creates a huge benefit for businesses, especially small businesses in terms of cost savings in taxes, what did the Conservative Party do? They voted against it.

When we lowered the corporate taxes not only just for large corporations but for small businesses, what did the Conservative Party do? They voted against it.

When we got rid of the capital tax in the province—the first province to do so—what did the Conservative Party do? They voted against that.

When we lowered corporate taxes for manufacturing and resource industries to 10%, what did the Conservative Party do? They voted against it.

We've got a circumstance where they stand up in the House and say one thing, but when it comes to real action, when it comes to voting and supporting the measures that actually create a stronger economy—such as a 4.5% corporate business tax rate, which is the lowest for small businesses anywhere in Canada—the party opposite has voted against it. When it comes to getting rid of capital tax, the party opposite voted against it. When it comes to lowering the manufacturing and resource-based corporate taxes to 10%, the party opposite voted against it. It's time for them to step up to the plate and really endorse the kinds of positions the government has taken that enhance the economic climate in the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I would like to take a few minutes to comment on my colleague from Kitchener—Conestoga, who spoke directly and affirmatively that this Liberal government is out of touch. I've been here eight months, and I notice that the government in power, the Liberal government, tends to continually talk about the past. It's time we look at now and the future, where we're headed in the province. By looking at the past, you're putting today's problems onto my kids' problems and my grandkids' problems and my great-grandchildren's problems. It's time to take a look at it, and let's deal with it now.

We've forwarded recommendations since we started here last November. The government didn't listen. We went away at Christmas vacation, hoping the committees would be set. The government didn't set the committees, so we couldn't put our input to the finance committee, nor could anybody in the whole province. We came back, and again we were to meet with the minister. By the time he called our finance critic, Peter Shurman, the budget was already to print. So I really don't know what they wanted us to participate in.

We looked at the budget when it came out—we had ample time—showing that they're heading on a wrong trajectory for this province. There are many things that we put forward—definitely a public sector wage freeze. The best thing about the PC Party is the fact that we want it fair and across the board, not just picking winners and losers. We are not ones to pick out a group and vilify them, like the government is doing right now to the doctors or the teachers. We want it fair and concise.

We're going to fix the apprenticeship rules. The member for Hamilton—Stoney Creek asked what the ratios are. We've said 1 to 1 for every type of apprenticeship. We'll wait to hear what you say. Don't comment now. You can think about it.

We're going to reduce red tape that is bugging up the system of starting a business or actually creating a business to have money to make jobs. We're going to cut that back at least 30%. And we want to get hold of our energy rates, something the government today doesn't seem to really care about. They think that businesses can afford the rates continuing. They can't, and we need to get them under control and make an environment for businesses to create jobs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to follow the comments of my colleagues here. Number one, I know I can't correct the record of another member, but I will point out to the member for Ottawa Centre that the small business tax rate in the province of Manitoba, an NDP-led government with eight successive majority terms, is 0%.

One of the reasons they've had so much success attracting business there is that they have had control of their energy rates. It's a public utility, and they utilize it as a strategic asset, something we haven't done here. We followed through with a series of privatization measures enacted first by the Harris Tories, followed up by Ernie Eves and successive Liberal governments, who have seen that as a way to go with our energy resource. We should see it as a strategic asset as well and move toward that direction, something we've proposed as a party here.

My colleague from Elgin-Middlesex-London brings up some really valid points. One that I would disagree with is the ratio for apprentices. Having run the apprenticeship program for the Labourers' union, LIUNA Local 65, having spent 10 years in the field in the heavy construction sector building bridges and roads and culverts and sewers, I would double your pay to come with me for a day on the job on the road, on the 401, and play Frogger, like the labourers do, dodging transport trucks. I challenge you to keep an eye on three apprentices as a journeyman, to make sure they are not only doing their job correctly but doing it safely as well.

Interjections.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Yeah, I know you want 1 to 1.

Interjections.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Three journeymen to one apprentice; that's what we have. What you're saying is that you want one journeyman—

Interjection: —and one apprentice.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Yes, one apprentice. We've got three journeymen looking after one apprentice.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Time's up.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I return to the member for Kitchener-Conestoga, who has two minutes.

Mr. Michael Harris: I would like to say thanks for the feedback received from the members from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, Ottawa Centre, Elgin-Middlesex-London and, of course, the member from Essex, who ran out of time.

1510

Mr. Speaker, during the election I had an opportunity to travel my riding and speak with a lot of business and community leaders, of course. I heard some awfully troubling stories about the red tape and the regulatory burden here in Ontario—a manufacturer in my riding of Kitchener-Conestoga and New Hamburg, making a great product that is used all over the world, talking about moving machines across the plant here and there, and just the bureaucracy that they had to deal with. Plenty of them talked to me about hydro rates here, and Ontario being one of the most expensive jurisdictions to make an investment in, with our hydro rates. That, at the end of the day, disallows these folks to hire people, when the rates of hydro are costing them more and more each year.

We talked about the business tax rate. In fact, our party called for a motion to hold the Liberal government to its promise of reducing that corporate tax rate down to 10%—of course, another broken promise.

One thing I would like to reiterate, and that's something that our party leader, Tim Hudak, who recently had the opportunity to travel to New York and meet with business leaders there, who told him—and I'll remind the members opposite, the Liberals, of this, just for the record: They said the three things that we need to get the Ontario economy back on track would be to, first, rein in spending, balance your books and pay down the debt; second—you guessed it—rein in spending, balance your books and pay down your debt; third, of course; bring down taxes on businesses and entrepreneurs. Those are the reasons that I've highlighted. It's unfortunate we didn't have an opportunity to take committees across the province of Ontario to hear this feedback that I'm relaying on to you today in terms of business owners across the province. I do hope the government will adhere to some of the advice I spoke to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: I would love to say that I'm happy to stand today to speak on Bill 55, but there isn't really much to be happy about inside this bill. Nonetheless, I'm here to stand on behalf of my constituents of Hamilton Mountain.

You know, coming and being new in the Legislature here, we had some expectations. As has been previously said by my colleagues before me, we expected to be able to take a budget and travel with that budget into our ridings, to be able to speak to the constituents of Ontario so that they knew what was coming forward before them. Unfortunately, the government of the day, the minority government, decided that that wasn't how we were going to be doing it this time around. No committees were struck right up until—we were already gone for Christmas break and still no committees were in place to be working on behalf of Ontarians. That was really disturbing, Mr. Speaker. But the New Democrats knew that the voices of Ontarians had to be heard, so we took the matter onto ourselves. I know in my own riding I was doing community meetings. I put out a mail-out to listen

to what people had to say; I made phone calls; I knocked on doors.

Here's what some people had to say: Eric responded to me and said job creation was very important, as was maintaining public services. He thought it was somewhat important to put limits on CEO salaries. Colleen said available and affordable child care was most important to her. Overwhelmingly, we heard that people wanted a balanced approach to balancing the budget. Since the budget was introduced, I've continued to hear from people in Hamilton Mountain, as I've been speaking to them on their doorsteps, and emails, all of that kind of stuff, making sure that they're being heard. I know New Democrats were doing that across the province, Mr. Speaker, making sure that we were picking up where the government was failing them.

It did a little bit of good, because we were able to make the budget a little bit more fair for the people of Ontario by implementing an extra 2% tax on people over \$500,000. You know, people at the top can afford the little bit that the people at the bottom can't. It's the people at the bottom feeling the everyday heat of this budget. When we have a freeze on our social services, Ontario Works and ODSP—

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Shame.

Miss Monique Taylor: That is shameful—thank you to my colleague here—that is really shameful.

The government brings forward another bill that says it's okay to raise the rent by 2.5% but in the budget bill we're saying we're putting a freeze on our most vulnerable. It doesn't really balance out very well, Mr. Speaker. So we seriously had some concerns about that and we were able to fight for a 1% increase, which isn't a lot, but at least it's only putting them 1.5% behind on their rent increase, instead of 2.5%. So it's a little bit of a gain.

Another thing that I heard the other day regarding this budget: I have a six-year-old child in my riding who's in the IBI program. I'm sure you've heard a lot about that in the House these last few days. It's a program for autistic children, severe autistic children. This child was in the school system Monday to Friday, not doing very well. How does a six-year-old get suspended from school? I'm not really sure, but this child was suspended for four days. The other days, when he wasn't suspended, he was sent home every day because they weren't able to control him. He's autistic. He has needs, right? What happens, finally, after years and years waiting on the wait-list for the IBI program? He was able to get into the IBI program. That was a huge win for the family, Mr. Speaker.

So he's in the program. He still has to go to school on Mondays, because that's part of the educational portion of this, and he isn't working out so well on the Mondays. So the IBI program says, "We can work with the Ministry of Education and we'll be able to give him his education within the IBI program." Well, now that the budget cuts have come through, people are seeing that that portion is going to be cut out. He was getting the education in the IBI program, the education's being cut,

through the budget, and under that education portion that's being cut, he's also losing his transportation costs, because the Ministry of Education was paying for his transportation to and from the IBI program. So he's got a huge loss. That's a six-year-old child facing that in the budget.

Has anybody heard or read about that in this budget? That's the stuff that we have hidden in this very big, big, big budget. It's hidden in here. I know I personally hadn't read it. It took a family to face these difficulties to bring it to my attention, to say that's what's happening to them. That's a cut happening in this budget. Is that something you're going to brag about? I don't hear it. It's unfortunate.

Like I said, Mr. Speaker, there's lots missing in this budget. We haven't been dealing with jobs. We know we have huge job losses when it comes to the horsemen in this province, with the OLG workers in this province. Families don't know which way to turn any more. They're losing their homes, they can't afford the rent, the HST on the hydro. Everything else is barrelling in on top of them, yet we just continue to cut and cut and cut.

Now we've got the privatization of ServiceOntario—another sad day. What are we going to do with this? Is it going to become the next Ornge fiasco, like we heard from my seatmate here previously? We're really concerned about that over on this side of the House because we're opening up a can of worms and just saying, "Have at it." There's nothing in place to ensure that people's information is kept private. We could be selling off their information to other sectors. Why do we have a do-not-call list? I don't know, because I think we're opening it up really wide there.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on and on about the challenges that are being faced in Hamilton Mountain and right across the province of what's happening here. We really seriously need to make sure that we're reading all the fine print in this budget and that we are trying to make it somewhat decent for the people of this province. They've worked hard. They don't deserve to be treated like this because of years of waste on your side of the bench, and it has been.

1520

Yes, we're all about all-day kindergarten too. We think it's a great program if you can afford it, but when we can't afford these kinds of things, that's what makes me wonder, is it worth it?

Grade 13: Those kids need those programs. They need to be able to have that to get into university and into the college programs, but that's being taken away from them too.

We're going to charge kids to take a school bus to school?

Mr. Speaker, every day families are falling further and further behind. The rich are getting richer in this province and the middle class doesn't really exist much these days. I know I'm hearing from a lot of families that you wouldn't expect are living from paycheck to paycheck

to paycheque, and it's only getting worse as the days go on.

Thank you very much for allowing me this time. I can't believe how quickly 10 minutes does go, but I'll be looking forward to hearing the comments from other members of this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I appreciate the comments made by the member from Hamilton Mountain, but I'm left a little confused, a little puzzled as to the position of the NDP, and this is the challenge I always get.

On one hand, the member from Hamilton Mountain said that she supports full-day kindergarten because it's a good thing and hopefully, in her view, it will help the middle class—I can tell you it does help the middle class—but then she said we cannot afford it so therefore we should not do it.

I don't understand that point of view, Speaker, because I think what budgets are about and this particular budget is about are making those very important, tough choices. One of the big choices we have made in this budget is to ensure that we continue to invest in our health care, especially at our community level, that we continue to invest in our education system, especially when it comes to the implementation of full-day kindergarten, because we know study after study has demonstrated that it benefits our four- and five-year-olds. It makes them better prepared to go into grade 1 and beyond. And also our investment in post-secondary education in terms of the 30% off tuition grant, which helps low- and mid-income families—those are the kinds of choices that we're making in this budget, while we're also working towards a strong plan to eliminate the deficit in the next five years, by 2017-18. I think these are the right choices to make. These are tough economic times; there are no ifs, and or buts about it.

I'm really glad that we had the opportunity to work along with the NDP to bring more improvements to this budget in terms of providing for social assistance increases in ODSP and OW, and the tax idea they had in terms of surtax, which will help offset and pay off the deficit as well. I think we need to continue to work together, but when it comes to key things like paying for full-day kindergarten, when it comes to key things like supporting our post-secondary education and investing in our community care where people need the most help, those are the priorities of this government. That's what we're focusing on. The other big element is the Ontario child benefit that helps lower-income families across the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to address the comments by my colleague from Hamilton Mountain.

She started out with something that we wholeheartedly agree with: There's not much to be happy about in this budget. There's just a whole lot of deferral. There are a lot of things that are going to go down the road that,

again, basically burden our kids and our grandkids, and it's just something that we can't continue to accept. They talk on that side of the House about strong debt. That's nothing to be proud of. What we needed to do was reverse that debt.

She talked about the lack of consultation with stakeholders. That's happening time and again. The horse racing industry: no consultation, "Here's what we're doing." The doctors today: "This is what we're doing"—no consultation, no willingness to work with them, although lots of rhetoric about partnership and working in collaboration. It's becoming very evident that that's the trend: "We know best and that's what is going to happen."

She talked about cuts, and I have empathy for those cuts, because people are going to get hurt through all this. Unfortunately, that's the reality of what happens when you overspend and mismanage the finances of our great province for eight years, as the Liberals have done. You can't continue to spend more money than you take in without somebody getting hurt down the road. It has been eight years of this and now we're in a heck of a hole. We're in a challenging time and tough decisions need to be made. The 2012 budget adds \$2.3 billion more. Think of the cuts and service challenges and the programs we're going to lose. If that interest, as my colleague from Kitchener-Conestoga raised, happened to increase—and they will, with those two recent downgrades by Moody's and Standard and Poor's. The inevitable is coming. Those interest rates are going to rise and there's going to be even more money. The third-biggest expenditure of our province is servicing the debt: \$10 billion. We cannot afford to do that.

We needed to take drastic action. We needed to create jobs. We needed to cut spending. And we needed to have a plan to reduce the deficit and the debt. None of those things are in the budget, despite us having those chats with the government about that. Peter Shurman, our finance critic, and Mr. Hudak did have that discussion, and nothing was taken into account. They still came out and said, "It's all good." Rose-coloured glasses. We couldn't support and we will not support the budget in its current fashion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank the member from Hamilton Mountain for a good presentation. She certainly touched on some points, but I think one sore point that got the attention of the member from Ottawa Centre was about costs. If he wants to take a look at costs—he lives near the Quebec border, I believe, near Ottawa. He's leaving, I guess. If I'm not mistaken, it's \$7 a day for daycare in Quebec—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to remind you that it's inappropriate to make reference to the absence of any member, as you know.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm sorry, Speaker. He's still listening down there. It's \$7 a day for daycare in Quebec, and now students in Quebec are on strike because they pay a

little over \$2,000 and they're going to negotiate with the Quebec government to lower that. For the average person here in university, it's \$6,000 a year, and they've actually had riots in Quebec over \$2,000 a year. So I'm a little confused about how—he's doing daycare; he believes in that, and that's good, and he's spending money on daycare, but what about the university kids? What about daycare for the parents that want to go back for career training or adult training? It's \$7 a day in Quebec to put your child in daycare—and quality daycare.

I think this government has got all their functions screwed up. I think they're completely in confusion. They need some direction. Maybe they should listen to the opposition parties occasionally in committee and get some good direction. Speaker, with all due respect, I've been here five years now and I think maybe I got half an amendment passed in one committee in four years, with five Liberal members, two Conservatives and one NDP—one half of an amendment. But then I see, Speaker, that all our ideas start showing up under a little bit of change, and it's all of a sudden their idea. But when we brought them forward when we could have saved money five years ago, they wouldn't even deal with it. They were too busy playing with their BlackBerrys and not paying attention to what was going on. So I really get frustrated when I hear examples of standing up and saying how wonderful his programs are.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Reza Moridi: It is my pleasure to rise in this House and speak to the budget, Bill 55. The budget which the finance minister brought to this House is a balanced budget. There are certain fundamentals in this budget. I'm just going to explain a little bit about the basic foundations of this budget.

First of all, according to this budget, we will keep investing in our basic infrastructure, including our education system. We are going to keep investing in our kindergarten, full-day kindergarten, which is about a \$1.5-billion investment per year, because education is very important for our society, for our country, for our province. Also, we are going to continue giving a 30% reduction in college and university fees for students so that our students can continue their education with peace of mind. Once they graduate from university, they will enter into the workforce and contribute to the economy of this province. These are some of the major foundations of this budget, Mr. Speaker.

In the meantime, we had it in mind that we were going to eliminate the deficit by the year 2017-18. That is one of the principles behind this budget brought forward to this House. The budget in 2012-13 includes \$17.7 billion in savings, which is quite considerable, and in the meantime, \$4.4 billion in raising the revenue for the government. When you add these two together, it comes to a figure of close to \$22 billion less in borrowing this year, according to this budget.

So this is a budget which basically looks forward. It's an action budget, Mr. Speaker. It aims to eliminate the

deficit by the year 2017-18, in the meantime, investing, as we have been doing in the past eight years, in education and health care.

1530

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Hamilton Mountain has two minutes to respond.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague here from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, the member from Richmond Hill and the member from Ottawa Centre.

I would like to respond to the member from Ottawa Centre saying that I said we shouldn't have full-time kindergarten. I never said that.

Interjection.

Miss Monique Taylor: Exactly. We need to know how we're going to pay for it. I think it's a fabulous program. I think a lot of children are going to enjoy being in all-day daycare. We know they're going to have to have afternoon naps, and there's going to be some difficulties along the road. But the problem is, we're robbing Peter to pay Paul, I believe, for that program at this point in time. We're cutting back on child care subsidies to help pay for those costs, and we just have to really ensure we're doing the right thing at the right time. It may have been a better time before this budget came forward that we were initiating programs like that. But looking at the budget, again, like I said, it's kind of brought a different day on to it.

I would like to thank all of the members for their comments regarding my debate. I was happy to bring the voice of Hamilton Mountain into this debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette): Further debate?

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: On behalf of the residents of Mississauga-Brampton South, I'm pleased to put forward my thoughts on the 2012 Ontario budget.

Every budget is about making choices, whether it's your own household budget, your business budget or the finances of the provincial government. Making the right choices is never easy. There is never enough money to meet our needs, so we have to set priorities. We all do it with our own families, and government is no different.

Budget 2012 lays out a five-year plan to keep Ontario on track, eliminate the deficit and balance the budget at the same time by 2017-18. What is most important is, it explains that the choices we are making are the right choices and why we are making them. We firmly believe that the choices we made in the 2012 budget are the similar ones that people would like to make in their own homes in Mississauga-Brampton South.

People want a strong education system because they recognize it is the best possible investment we can make in the future of our children. By working together, we have made great changes over the past eight years, in contrast to chaos, cuts and confrontation under the previous government.

Others would choose to do it differently. They would scrap full-day kindergarten. They would get rid of the

30% tuition reduction in post-secondary education. They would raise class sizes, and they would fire teachers. Those would be wrong choices. Those wouldn't be the right choices.

We have been making the right choices since 2003, and this budget is also about right choices. The people of Mississauga–Brampton South have seen the positive impacts of right choices. The new Sheridan campus in Mississauga is the result of a right choice which will help not only our youth, adults, seniors and newcomers, but it will also create jobs and drive the local economy. The new med school in Mississauga, at UTM, is the result of a right choice which will provide access to more doctors. The launch of full-day kindergarten is the result of a right choice. In my own riding, more than five schools have full-day kindergarten, and I have never met a parent who doesn't like full-day kindergarten, because it provides a seamless day both for the parents and children and saves \$6,500 per child in daycare for the parents, and it enables our children to get the best start possible in their schools and enables them to be competitive in the tough world economy.

Increasing grants for student needs, which has been almost \$4,000 since 2003, per student, has made our publicly funded education system the best in the English-speaking world.

People want a strong health care system, because when someone we love is sick, nothing else matters. Eighteen new hospitals are the result of positive choices, including the redevelopment of Peel Memorial in Brampton. And 200 family health teams are the result of right choices, and more access to doctors is the result of right choices. The launch of a comprehensive strategy for mental health and addiction is the result of right choices. Our government allocated \$257 million and laid out a 10-year strategy so that we can have a coordinated and responsive mental health care system.

Last week, I was at Associated Youth Services of Peel in my riding. By 2013, \$1.3 million will flow to that riding, which will work alongside the teachers in the schools to help our children. What is this? This is a result of right choices, positive choices.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada has also given its recommendations, and I urge the federal government to implement its recommendations as soon as possible so that we can work together to help our youth, to help our children. We do not want to leave them in the lurch.

Mr. Speaker, because of our government's right choices, we have made Ontario very competitive. Ontario has become the second place, after California, in the world to attract foreign investment, and we have already lowered more than \$8 billion a year in business taxes, which is working. Everywhere in Ontario—and in my riding many businesses, such as Concept Plastics, Silfab Ontario, Hydrogenics and many more in my riding and in Mississauga and across Ontario, have seen the benefits of that tax reduction. As a matter of fact, I was talking to the CEO of Concept Plastics this past week. They advised

me that they are working 24-7 and they are creating jobs as a result of lower taxes.

We have created 371,000 jobs since the recessionary low in June 2009, despite the sluggish US economy, the high Canadian dollar, rising oil prices and ongoing uncertainty in the global economy.

1540

Mr. Speaker, this budget is all about the right choices we have been making since 2003 and we have made in this budget—and we will continue to do so. We have created a Jobs and Prosperity Council so that we can stay on a sustainable path. Last week, the CEO and president of the Royal Bank, Gordon Nixon, was appointed as the chair, and he has already started working on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is a real plan, it's a positive plan, and this is a strong action plan. It's more than an economic document; it's all about the values we believe as Ontarians: to have good schools, to have good colleges, good universities and good hospitals. This budget will eliminate the deficit and at the same time balance the budget by 2017-18 and protect the gains we have made in health and education. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the speech from the member from Mississauga–Brampton South. She talked a lot about right choices, as referenced in the budget bill. Mr. Speaker, last year the deficit for the province of Ontario was \$15.3 billion. This year it's going to be \$15.2 billion. So we still have this huge deficit. The government had their own economic adviser, Mr. Drummond, who I would say was more of a stall tactic to get beyond the election than anything else. But he spent many months looking at Ontario finances. What he said was that if the government continues to spend the way they've spent the last eight years, status quo is that by 2017 we won't have a balanced budget, as the government has predicted; we'll have a \$30-billion deficit and we will have a tripling of the debt in the province, to \$411 billion. Mr. Speaker, those are scary numbers, and that's what this budget is putting forward: scary numbers that we continue to spend way beyond our means.

Mr. Drummond's report put out a lot of recommendations—there were 360-odd recommendations—and then the government very quickly started to say, "We won't do this. We won't do that. We won't follow that recommendation." But they haven't replaced it with anything else to save money. So despite talking a good game about balancing the budget, so far we've seen very little action, and that's of great concern.

In 2010, I remember the finance minister talking about freezing wages, and that has just not happened. We hear a lot of talk about right choices. Well, I see bankruptcy for the province of Ontario on the path we're heading.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I just want to reiterate some of the comments that the member from Mississauga–

Brampton South had started with, which is making choices and what those choices are going to be, making the right choices. Let's review some of the choices that this Liberal government has decided to make.

The choice they made in regard to the budget is no discussions. The choice they made in regard to the horse racing industry is no discussions. The choice in regard to the ONTC—no discussions. Again, we're following that through, following the pattern, and we're going to talk about the casinos—no discussions. ServiceOntario—there may be some discussions, but we're going to privatize it and we're going to open up a much bigger problem, which is a very big concern for communities that I represent in Algoma-Manitoulin. You have to remember, Algoma-Manitoulin is not a bike ride away from community to community, and it is not just a Tim Hortons cup to get from one community to the other. It's a large and vast area. When you start eliminating some of these services and taking them away from those communities, it is a very scary thought for those individuals. You have seniors in these communities who are very dependent on these services, having them close by in their communities, where they can have access to renew their health card, where they won't have to drive two hours down the highway. These are very important issues to people in the community. So it all comes back to choices.

Again, I like hearing when the government is saying that we're making choices, but when you're making those choices, they have to be followed by discussions where you're actually engaging people who are living in these communities, not just making an announcement in a local coffee shop or making an announcement on a random piece. You actually have to sit at the table and engage in those discussions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Mississauga-Brampton South for her comments. I think she did a good job early on in her remarks of characterizing exactly what it is that a budget is all about. That's what's being debated here today. Of course, my view of it is that it does, to a large degree, set out the priorities and the plans of the government moving forward. Historically—I think it's fair to say since 2003—the priorities of our government have been primarily health care and education, and I think this budget once again exhibits a very clear commitment to health care and education.

We've heard the name of Mr. Drummond mentioned today in the debate as it unfolds. He made some very strong recommendations that we have not followed when it came to education especially. This budget reconfirms our commitment.

I would say to the people interested in this debate, and especially those in my riding of Thunder Bay-Atikokan, that there are some obvious numbers, and even though we all have too many numbers floating around, when you can say we have 3,400 more doctors working in Ontario

today than we did eight years ago and when you can say we have 15,000 more nurses working today than we did in 2003, I think that very clearly articulates a commitment to health care.

Just last week, in my riding, we had an announcement province-wide, of course, of 900-plus more nurses; 66 of those will be in my riding. A nurse practitioner clinic is an example of our commitment. It has 3,200 formerly orphaned patients now rostered in the nurse practitioner clinic: a method of delivering health care that's transforming health care, that is rostering people who previously did not have access to a primary care provider. We're making great strides in this regard, Mr. Speaker.

There's always more work to be done, but this budget clearly articulates our commitment to health care and education.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I stand and respond to the member from Mississauga-Brampton South.

Her talking about her party's commitments to education and health care, and then going on to compare Ontario to California, is interesting, because our debt per person is more than 10 times what it is in California, a state that's considered to be bankrupt.

We look at our deficit this year that they somehow brag about as being a spending cut. In actual fact, if you take the combined total of all the other provinces—the nine provinces—we're over three times that total. There's definitely no signs of any strategic planning.

Our condition for supporting this budget was some control on spending. It comes down to choices, really. We look at priorities, and it would be great—I think this government treats spending as if they're in a supermarket on a shopping spree, where you run around and just fill up the cart without any regard for what things cost. Sooner or later the system is going to fail and we're going to have to go back and pay this off or join some of our previous allies in Greece and Spain, where we'll actually have other people bailing us out. It's a matter of making the right choices.

When we look at some of our spending in health care, we look at the scandals in health care, whether it be eHealth or whether it be the Ornge ambulances, where billions are wasted, and we hear this time and time again.

It's interesting to note some of the history. If you go back to when we first got in here, on November 11 the Auditor General warned this government of the spending; in December, Moody's Investors Services downgraded it to negative; February 2012, the Conference Board of Canada warned that they could not reach their 2018 target; March 2012, the minister releases the budget, and then we're followed by two quick downgrades. The world is telling us we have a problem here—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

That concludes the time we have for questions and comments. I return to the member for Mississauga-Brampton South for her two-minute reply.

1550

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I appreciate the comments from the members from Parry Sound–Muskoka, Algoma–Manitoulin and Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka spoke about the debt. Mr. Speaker, I wonder how he forgets how much debt they left in 2003: a \$5.8-billion deficit. You left a \$5.8-billion deficit, and you hid it. You didn't even disclose it. And the economy was booming south of the border, the dollar was low and gas prices were low as well. You forget about what you have done—what your government has done—when you were in power.

What we are talking about is right choices, the right choices, the path we can set, how we can eliminate the deficit, balance the budget and at the same time protect the values Ontarians love. We all know that Ontarians like the best education system and Ontarians like the best health system. The Leader of the Opposition, John Tory, even said that Ontario has the best education system. Under whose watch? Under this government's watch. He said it in 2008.

This is what this budget is. It's all about priorities, and we have set up priorities. We will eliminate the deficit and balance the budget by 2017-18, and we will protect the gains we have made in education and health.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'm grateful for the opportunity to present some ideas coming from people in my area, down in Haldimand and Norfolk. Would that the circumstances were different than having to address the government's ironically titled strong measures for Ontario act. I say "ironically" because the only strong measures seem to be the words in the title.

We have here a very weak offering, an offering that will continue the steady march to an increased deficit and increased debt. As we know, we're looking down the barrel at \$411.4 billion four or five years down the road. It doesn't take the recent budget—these budget measures as well—to remind us that the fundamental building block in our province, our fiscal foundation, is not stable, something our finance critic has reminded us all of in this House.

That means that the money to pay for the things we all value—I know there's been talk of health care and education very recently this afternoon; infrastructure as well. All of this is threatened. Nobody knows this better than the taxpayer, who knows what happens when he can't get control of finances in the home or on the farm or in their small business.

Don Drummond understands this. You know, Speaker, that's the Don Drummond this government paid to give them direction on how to rein in spending on that \$32-billion deficit and that \$411.4-billion debt. That's the same Don Drummond the government continues to ignore. That's the report that's presently sitting on the shelf. I am assuming it's a dusty shelf and we have yet another report gathering some dust.

If Ontario has any chance to come close to its predicted balanced budget by 2017-18, Drummond notes,

"The provincial government must take much tougher fiscal measures over a protracted period than anyone has yet discussed publicly." He goes on to say that that means "deeper cuts to program spending on a real per capita basis, and over a much longer period of time, than the Harris government did in the 1990s." Given eight years of McGuinty spending—the excess—meeting a balanced budget target means that program spending must drop 2.7% over the next seven years; again, Drummond's figures. That's 0.4% annually, a decline in government spending that even Mr. Drummond admits is unprecedented.

I'm not necessarily an advocate of Drummond's cuts in spending; I'm an advocate of cutting wasteful spending where necessary. By and large, people in my riding and across the province are thrifty. We cannot live beyond our means without eventually hitting a wall. In my view, everyone inherently understands that there are limits. There's a difference between things we'd like to have and things we need. Sometimes you have to make a choice. Business understands this. That's what business does. Money comes in; money goes out. You live right on the line every single day. Ideally, you know how much you made that day or how much you lost. You have to stay lean, you have to compete and you have to continually do things better. You have to do things more efficiently and, most importantly, you have to do things more effectively.

Where's the plan? I see no plan in this proposal for the 600,000 men and women; they wake up each morning with no job to go to. Where is the plan, again, to steer us off that path to a \$30.2-billion deficit and a \$411.4-billion debt? Mr. McGuinty faced two paths; he took the wrong path. Normally what I've seen, when Mr. McGuinty reaches a fork in the road, he can't make up his mind and he takes the fork. At least he made a decision. There was a path that demanded urgent action for reducing the bloated size and cost of government and restoring private sector job creation. The other path was the status quo, one of mediocrity, accepting anemic growth, major job losses and a weak response to the massive deficit. As we know, Mr. McGuinty chose the second path.

This isn't an austerity budget. It's terribly disappointing. It's a disappointing response to a very serious and deepening job crisis and a spending crisis. We hear this constantly in the House. It just kicks the can down the road. It is time for a different path. It's a time to discuss some alternatives. It's time for some very, very tough discussion about the fact that we're staring down the barrel of this tremendously large debt.

Many expected much more than deferred spending, much more than voluntary wage freezes and tweaks to government pensions. We see that a McGuinty public sector wage freeze has become little more than a talking point. I find it sad. I was shocked, in the budget, when social assistance recipients had their benefits frozen. We did see Mr. McGuinty change his mind on that one. We saw the child care benefit delayed. It's obviously easier

for this government to pick the low-hanging fruit rather than to deal with one issue—for example, public sector compensation. Public sector compensation makes up well over 50% of government spending. Public sector compensation—not only wages but also benefits, pension and other stipends—makes up well over 50% of that \$411.4-billion debt that's projected by Mr. Drummond.

There is a way out of this. I spent eight years—I spent time with you, Speaker—on the finance committee. I spent time with the member for Muskoka. Discussions—it seemed like endless discussions.

Citizen participation: What happened this winter? No hearings—no finance committee hearings; the end of citizen participation for what I consider, and especially at this particular time, one of the most important issues that we need to deal with. A vacuum is left with currently a defunct pre-budget process. In opposition, we presented a number of ideas. We called for action to help kick-start the economy. Obviously, we talked about a public sector wage freeze, a mandatory freeze. We talked about outsourcing. We talked about arbitration reform. Again, with something like 55% of all government program expenses going to wages and benefits, something has got to give, and pretty soon. A fair, effective, legislated public sector salary freeze, in contrast to Mr. McGuinty's unenforceable voluntary wage freeze, is a very important first step—something that a number of other provinces have done themselves. In fact, the Premier admitted himself that he “couldn't agree more” with a Conference Board of Canada report suggesting that, “If we don't do things in a different way, we're not going to be able to balance our budget in 2017-18.”

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I'm running out of time, Speaker. I think the bottom line is, we have to get our house in order. We have to take a look at this tremendous expense of public sector compensation. We need to look at some ideas like linking public sector compensation to gross domestic product, linking it to job creation and economic growth. Now, there would be an incentive for one million public sector employees at the municipal level and the provincial level to pitch in and have a vested interest in helping to boost our private sector economy. We see the ideas, we see the innovation in the private sector economy. We have to come up with some measures to better enable our public servants to be part of some of these solutions.

What do we see on the other side? We see another round of business tax cuts, this in the middle of an economic downturn. We see this hare-brained idea to tax the rich. That's a guarantee to drive out job creators in our province. We need better ideas than that.

I put a lot of my faith in the public sector. Over one million employees in the province of Ontario—70% are unionized. They are organized, and they are there to help our province of Ontario to come out of this crisis.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you for the comments from the member for Haldimand–Norfolk. He had

mentioned that this budget that's been presented is not an austerity budget. I'm not sure what example we need to show how much of an austerity budget it is when he made the comment about this government going after the low-hanging fruit, people on social assistance. If it doesn't get more austerity than that, I don't know where else that definition may be in encompassing that.

Not to point any fingers, but just a history fact—that's all—that I want to kind of bring to light is that under the government of the Conservatives back about 16 years ago, they actually cut OW by approximately 22%. I'm glad he's sympathetic to the fact that this government didn't want to at least give the inflationary amount to people on assistance or ODSP, but there's a lot more to be done when we talk about austerity that is affecting people who can't give any more and their belts are tightened enough as it is.

The other history tidbit that brings to mind when we talk about OW and how they were cut back 22%, 16 years ago, and the minister at the time was community and social services—I hope I say his name right, Mr. Tsubouchi. He suggested that people who were on social assistance perhaps could get their protein from a 69-cent can of tuna. It's really disturbing to hear that we aren't giving more to people who need a little more because they're at the bottom of the financial scale, but yet we're trying to balance a budget on their backs as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Haldimand–Norfolk for his comments. Not surprisingly from that side of the House, from the official opposition, a fair bit of focus placed on the deficit position that we find ourselves in: That's fair; that's understandable; that's expected.

A couple of points on that, though: I would remind people, as well as my colleague just a few minutes ago did, that in 2003, during incredibly robust economic times in the United States, our primary trading partner, we found ourselves saddled with a \$5.5-billion deficit when we came to government. I think that's relevant because the times were incredibly different. We had a very low Canadian dollar. We were primarily an exporting economy at that time, and yet under those incredibly strong economic circumstances, we still inherited a \$5.5-billion deficit that subsequently required legislation on our behalf so that no incoming government could find a surprise—let's just leave it at that—when they come in.

The other thing I would say on the budget, Speaker, as well, is that in the very recently concluded provincial election, in October 2011, in terms of the commitment to bringing the province back into balance, the position of the official opposition as well as the position of our government was exactly the same in terms of the time-lines. Your party committed in your election documents to bringing the province back into a balanced position by 2017-18. That's exactly the same commitment that we've made, and we intend to meet that commitment.

The other thing I would say as well in terms of the priorities that the budget lays out is on the full-day

kindergarten piece. It's interesting here as well that in your election document in October, just six or eight months ago, there was a commitment to full-day kindergarten. Yet since we've been here, Speaker, I've heard numerous questions from members of the official opposition criticizing that position that we maintained in this budget. What a difference six or eight months can make.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: It's a great privilege and honour to speak to the words of our member from Haldimand-Norfolk. I agree with everything he says.

We have here a budget that is mistitled completely, Strong Action for Ontario. There's no strong action at all, except that you're strongly digging a bigger hole than we've ever seen in this country for any province before.

They ignore the hard realities that we have a huge debt and a growing deficit. They've increased spending, and their answer to all of that is to just keep the horses pulling away and spending more of our money. They carry on with green energy acts, which are a huge waste of money. They're going to carry on with the full-day junior kindergarten program, which is \$1.5 billion that we just don't have and we can't spend.

All of these things were recommended by the Auditor General and the Drummond report to be big numbers that we need to address, and something needs to be done. It would have been so easy to fix an awful lot of our financial woes—but this budget doesn't—just by doing the very obvious things. A public sector wage freeze is an obvious one; selling some crown corporations. Reducing the corporate tax rate is an obvious one. It would have been money—an incentive to create plants and jobs. It goes on and on.

They seem to ignore the realities and good examples we see—or bad examples—that are going on in Europe. We have the French. We have the Greeks, whose answer to hitting the wall is just to turn harder to the left. They continue to dig a bigger hole for themselves.

I'm pleased to speak in support of our colleague's words. It disappoints me that our member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan has nothing to say but to point at us, when it's not a problem that we created, but we're all going to have to live with it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I sit here very attentively, and I look at both sides of the room. Everyone has their way of using the tool, and I use as a tool the Drummond report. Both sides seem to use it in the way they interpret it. Within the Drummond report, there was a lot of austerity measures. But in principle, the Drummond report dealt with everything that we can cut—take it out, rip it away, throw it away.

The one big question that I always fail to hear within this room is, what happened to the revenue side of it? That wasn't part of the Drummond report. I'm just wondering, if it would have been, would we be talking about the Drummond report right now? That was a big

part of that puzzle that wasn't included in there, which we seem to not be talking about.

Why haven't we been talking about where those dollars have gone? Where were they going? How were they spent? Why wasn't there more accountability on those dollars that were going out? We always keep referring to, "We're doing too much; we're spending too much. We're doing this wrong. We're doing that wrong." But that was a big part of this puzzle that was missing.

I like what the member from Haldimand-Norfolk—he actually brought up a point that this government chose to pick on the low-hanging fruit. Well, the NDP chose to look at the top of the tree. There are fruits that are lying at the top of the tree as well. Those fruits are also in a much better position to provide a little bit of assistance for the entire province, in the state that we're in right now. I don't think it was a big step that we took there; it was a small step. It was a small 2% increase so that we can balance it out for the entire province.

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So look at the tree, yes. Look at all of the tree. There are fruits all over the place that you could actually benefit from and actually bring prosperity to the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I return now to the member for Haldimand-Norfolk, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Toby Barrett: The member from Davenport did talk about what I thought was unfortunate when this budget came in. They did go after the low-hanging fruit. Thanks to my colleagues opposite, Mr. McGuinty changed his mind; it's not the first time he's changed his mind in the last eight years.

I agree with the member from Algoma-Manitoulin: There are other approaches. There are some big fish that we can take a look at. I've made it very clear that I don't advocate taxing the rich, but when you see a \$411.4-billion debt—much of that attributed to wasteful spending—half of that debt is as a result of public sector compensation. It's time for us to reach out to the one million-plus public sector employees and ensure that they and their representatives are part of this discussion, part of these consultations and negotiations to help us get out of this hole.

The member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan reminded us of the first Liberal budget. That was the first Liberal deficit. They couldn't balance the books then, obviously, and cannot balance the books now. It is time for this government, in conjunction with the other parties, to come up with some ideas, some options, some alternatives, some ways that we can deal with—in a very thoughtful, consultative way—to get ourselves out of this hole.

I worked for a government agency back in the Bill Davis era. I was an employee representative. Every year, voluntarily, my wife and I would take one month off without pay. There's an idea to consider again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Since I've been in the House, this is one of the largest bills that I've seen come across our desk, Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts, the Strong Action for Ontario Act.

New Democrats recognize that when the people of Ontario spoke in October 2011, they sent a very clear message: They voted in a minority government, and they wanted to see all parties contribute and work together to make life better for all Ontarians. The message that they left us with—that I heard on the doorstep, anyway—was that life needs to be more affordable. They want to protect their health care, and they want good jobs—good, permanent jobs—with benefits.

When the budget process started, New Democrats listened to Ontarians. We listened to the message, and they rolled up our sleeves and we said, "This is a minority government. Our role to play here is to contribute to this budget process and try to make life better for Ontarians."

One of the things that our leader of the New Democratic Party did, as well as the finance critic from Beaches—East York, was that they decided to take matters into their own hands and tour the province so they could listen to Ontarians and see what they had to say—because unfortunately, this government decided that there weren't going to be any budget consultations, and the voices of Ontarians weren't being heard. We took it upon ourselves to do that because we needed to know what people were feeling so that we could contribute with some value to this budget. They went to ridings all over Ontario; they didn't just pick certain ones. They made sure they got a good segment of what people were feeling.

We also went a step further and decided that when the budget was released we were going to actually get input from people as well; so the pre-budget consultations and then when the budget was released. We had a website, and we had telephone lines for every person in Ontario to contribute. When we had that happen, we heard that people's voices were asking us to make this budget fair. They didn't want an election, but they wanted some action to be taken to make this budget fair.

Because we heard the voices of everyday folks, we came up with some proposals to the budget to try to work with this government and make life better for Ontarians. This government proposed that even the most vulnerable of our society, earning the type of benefits as low as they could be with ODSP, someone on a disability pension, take part in this austerity budget. But Speaker, I ask myself, if someone is on a budget that's as little as between \$1,000 to \$1,100, and that's the average, when they have their rent—I can speak for my riding; a one-bedroom apartment in London, if you're lucky and it's a very modest apartment, is \$700. Then, of course, you have your nutrition. You have to buy your food. If you're lucky enough to own a car, you've got to put gas in the car and you also have to have insurance. As well, if you have a couple of children—well, if you have a one-bedroom apartment, hopefully you're not going to have

your whole family living there. But if you do have other accommodations and you're on ODSP and you have your children, those kids aren't going to be participating in sports or have the extracurricular activities they could have when perhaps someone is working and has a good, permanent, paying job that can help the quality of life to raise their family in their community.

So Speaker, we asked ourselves, where is the fairness in that proposal, having a zero increase in ODSP and zero in OW? What we came up with—and my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin touched on it, and many of my colleagues in the House recently—is that people who make more money and have a good quality of life could contribute to the deficit and it would hit their family's financial status in a much softer way, rather than someone who is already being hit hard and then it's just going to get harder with that asking to take no increase on their benefits.

That's what Ontarians were saying: The budget wasn't fair. So we looked at that piece, and we proposed that piece for fairness. To our surprise, it was actually embraced by many, many Ontarians. It's not a concept that is unreasonable. It's a very practical thing to think of when someone—if I made more money, \$500,000, half a million dollars, I certainly would want to contribute to a better quality of life for others who perhaps couldn't do it themselves. So that was one of the pieces we contributed towards this budget. That was one.

The next one that we looked at as far as fairness is corporate tax rates. Since the Liberals have been in office, they dropped the corporate tax rate from 15% to the current amount, 11.5%. Their proposal was to even further decrease the corporate tax rate. Their plan was to have more jobs created in Ontario, but that wasn't working, because when you go from a 15% corporate tax rate to 11.5% in the timeline that they were in power—it wasn't working because the unemployment rate was creeping up. And then again, that fairness piece that we talked about, Speaker, we brought a motion and we suggested in this House that fairness, again, should be—don't lower the corporate tax; let's look at keeping it stable. It was reasonable. The government agreed to that. So that was another fair piece we brought into the budget, and not just asking those who are in the most vulnerable state to contribute to this budget. Having the corporate tax rate stay the same helps businesses also contribute, and we proposed a balance to that.

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We proposed recently in this House that, let's say a business creates a job, then we want to reward job creators. So keeping that 11.5%, they're contributing back; should they go out and hire a new hire or retrain or get a new piece of equipment, then we're saying, "Let's reward those job creators." That's fair, Speaker, because it's a balanced way of looking at revenue generating, right? We're not going to lower that 11.5% corporate tax rate any lower, so it's going to stay the same, so it's going to generate a little more revenue than lowering it. Then we're saying, "If you do create a job, that person

who's going to work in your business is going to put money back into the economy, is maybe going to take their kids out to soccer, take them out for dinner, invest in their community," and therefore we're going to reward that job creator. There's a practical, reasonable way of how to stimulate the economy.

I'm very glad to have talked on the budget. It's a big bill; I think it's 365 pages, so you can read a page a day, but we're not going to have that leisure. It certainly is something that we were proud of as New Democrats here in the House, that we were able to give a couple of proposals and inject a little fairness into this budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It certainly is a pleasure to make a few comments on our colleague from London—Fanshawe's thoughts on Bill 55. She made the comment that this is a very large bill, a big bill with so many pages. Yes, indeed, it is, because it's a very comprehensive five-year plan to balance the budget by 2017-18 while maintaining a lower rate of growth and spending and making sure that we meet our deficit targets that have been laid out previously. So, of course, it is a very comprehensive bill.

The Minister of Finance asked each ministry to look at where potential savings were. In fact, this plan lays out some \$17.7 billion worth of savings and actions to contain cost increases. There are some \$4.4 billion worth of revenue-raising measures. So, we have had a very detailed look at the workings of this government.

I would like to say that certainly the third party entered into meaningful negotiations with our government and did provide us with some useful changes, and the member referred to fairness. I think that's a very, very good point. I recently met with a number of seniors in my riding and we discussed changing the Ontario Drug Benefit Program so that 5% of senior ODB recipients with the highest incomes would pay more for their prescription drugs. Much to my surprise—this was certainly a fairly affluent group of seniors—they were wholeheartedly in favour of that.

So I think this budget certainly brings this measure of fairness the member talked about while, of course, putting forward a very strong five-year plan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I know the member from Davenport made reference to rewarding the job creators. I think we can build on that idea. I feel we can broaden that idea to work in incentives.

Again, I know earlier this afternoon I made mention of well over a million people that work for the public sector—provincial, municipal, in our hospitals and in our education system. There are things that we can do to reach out to employees in the public sector to provide some wage incentives, or disincentives, if need be, to try to link the overarching issue of public sector compensation, which we're using borrowed money to pay for half of those kinds of bills, to reach out to the leadership to

ask the public sector to, in a more fulsome way, address the issue of overspending and the resulting deficit and the debt.

We in the baby boom crowd have created this problem. We didn't pay our bills. We ran up the debt. We've done this. We have done this most recently through the present Liberal government.

In my view, the challenge to the New Democratic Party, as they recognize, or I hope they recognize, the chickens have come home to roost, whether it's paying taxes—not that revenue is the overarching problem. But if we don't solve it, we cannot ask our kids to do this. Our kids are having trouble getting jobs as it is, and we look to the third party for some ideas with respect to reform and with respect to the transformation of how we do business in the public sector for starters.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'm honoured to join in the debate. My colleague from London—Fanshawe touched on some very important parts. Essentially, the theme of her remarks and of our approach is about fairness. It's offensive that we look to always cutting those who are hard off before we look to other sources.

Touching on the member from Algoma—Manitoulin, there are those who are not the low-hanging fruit; there are those who are the high-hanging fruit. There are ways of delivering services that can save us money. There are ways of increasing our revenues so that we protect those people who are most vulnerable.

Looking at the public sector, the public sector is an example of well-paid people who deserve to be paid well, but they're still workers. They are still people who are putting in their hard-earned, daily—they are exchanging their time for money. They are people who are working hard and providing excellent services, and that's not where we should look to create savings. Let's look at public sector CEOs who are making millions of dollars. Let's look at corporations who aren't creating jobs in Ontario. Let's look at those people as a measure of fairness, as a measure of a comprehensive approach to improving Ontario, and not simply cutting services and cutting where it hurts people who are vulnerable.

As an example, the corporate tax regime in Ontario has been steadily decreasing and our jobless rate has been steadily increasing. It's clearly not working as a strategy. We need to have a shift in our paradigm so that we look at effective measures that actually impact in a meaningful way. If we want to have more jobs in Ontario, let's create a tax structure that addresses that. If we want to reduce the deficit, let's look at our costs and our expenses that are inefficient and create more efficiencies and protect those who are hard off while looking at people who can afford to pay more.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to respond to the member from London—Fanshawe. She certainly speaks well for those who need additional help and obviously

was one of the ones who worked very hard to get the additional dollars for the Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works. That \$55 million extra will certainly benefit those families.

I'd like to talk about what was in the budget even before that, though, for families, and the Ontario child credit. It isn't going to be increased as fast as we would have hoped for, but the Ontario child credit has contributed to lifting about 20,000 children out of poverty. That's very important, and that has been acknowledged by studies. It will be going up from \$1,100 to \$1,210 in July 2013, and in July 2014 up to \$1,310 per child who qualifies.

Of course, one of the really important benefits for all families is full-day kindergarten. That has taken a lot of the dollars, that expense, off the families and is getting the children from homes where it is more difficult for the children, taking them into full-day schools at age four and age five. It's going to be a big benefit to those families, ongoing. These are really important issues.

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There have been improvements with what the third party has come in and negotiated with this government. Those dollars are very important, the 1% increase in ODSB and Ontario Works. You have your heart in the right place. I support certainly what you have added to the budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I return to the member for London—Fanshawe, who has two moments to reply.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I wanted to thank the members from Oak Ridges—Markham, Haldimand—Norfolk, Bramalea—Gore—Malton and Ottawa—Orléans. I just want to maybe mention to the member from Haldimand—Norfolk that my riding is London—Fanshawe and my seatmate's is Davenport.

Interjection.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Not a problem. You'll never forget that now, right?

I do appreciate the comments. The theme I was putting out there was fairness. The two pieces that I talked about certainly have made this somewhat fair with regard to a surtax on those making half a million dollars of about 2% to 3%, I think it is, and the other piece about corporate taxes to stay at 11.5%.

The other item that I didn't get a chance to speak to was the executive salary freeze. That fairness piece also came from the New Democrats. It applies to the CEO, president, board members, vice-president, chief administrative officer, chief operating officer, chief financial officer, chief information officer or others that hold any other executive position.

Ms. Cindy Forster: A lot of chiefs.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: That's a lot of chiefs.

Again, that's a leadership thing. I think that we have taken that leadership and said this budget needs to be a little fairer, and those that are better off than most could give a little more. That is a piece that I think is really

important: that we have this in this budget so that it's all shared by everyone.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: It's great to have an opportunity to speak on the budget bill, Bill 55. May I say, as a northerner, I'm very proud to be part of a government that brought forward such a strong budget, a budget that indeed seeks to protect the actions taken to see that our health care system continues to be one of the best in the world and to be part of a government that also focuses so strongly on the gains we've made in the education sector. It keeps those priorities but also makes it very clear that one of our clear goals needs to be our commitment to eliminate the deficit by the 2017-18 fiscal year. That capacity allows us to focus on our very clear priority of jobs and the economy: creating jobs and certainly building our economy all across the province.

I know that the members in this House are well aware of the recent very good news in northern Ontario related to the developments of the Ring of Fire, and many other opportunities that are there as well. We want to continue to seek those opportunities.

I'm also very pleased, in my position as the Minister of Natural Resources, to have various aspects of our ministry become a significant part of the budget bill as well. I think, as most people know, that the Ministry of Natural Resources is an incredibly important one all across the province of Ontario. When I was asked to take over the responsibilities by the Premier—obviously, it's a great honour, being a northerner, to be the minister responsible for this great ministry with such an iconic status but also to learn, as I have, how important the ministry is all across the province. May I say that the reality is that the ministry is facing some real pressures and has to contribute as part of the fiscal plan to the responsibilities we have to help eliminate the deficit.

I think many people in the Legislature know and understand that the Ministry of Natural Resources is responsible for 46 different pieces of legislation. It was more like 28, I think, in the mid-1990s. We have 300 different permits or authorizations that are part of the work that our ministry people do—very, very labour-intensive. So we are using this opportunity, certainly, of the budget exercise to also begin a three-year transformation of our ministry so that we can actually deliver services in a more efficient and better manner, recognizing that those core principles of our ministry will always be important to us, will always be a real priority for our ministry. But we need to find ways to do it in a fashion that will continue to be well received by the people in the province of Ontario, but we can also do it in a better fashion.

This bill proposes to amend nine laws, nine of our 46 pieces of legislation administered by the ministry. We believe that the amendments that are being brought forward, the enabling legislation, will enable us to deliver on our mandate to manage and protect the province's natural resources in a way that truly serves Ontarians better.

We have, I think perhaps with the best of intentions over the years, created processes that I think most people would agree perhaps take too long, and they cost a fair amount to administer as well. So whether you're a homeowner planning work on your property, whether you're a forestry company working to create jobs all across the province or you're working to help protect endangered species, we have been told by a lot of people that the ministry's rules and their processes don't always work for them.

What we're looking for in terms of the potential amendments to the legislation would help us streamline the approvals processes so that the ministry can provide faster, more responsive services with the reduced financial resources that we have, but also help us maintain our core priorities, because that is absolutely our bottom line. I want to be very clear on that. Make no mistake about our ministry's commitment to our core principles and priorities: fish and wildlife, endangered species protection, forestry crown land management, water parks, protected areas—Ontario parks are all opening up this weekend, of course, Victoria Day weekend. We're excited about that. It's very exciting news—non-renewable resources and public safety. Our commitment to those core priorities is unwavering, and we will certainly make sure that that is maintained.

So the transformation plan itself will certainly help preserve, but it will also, to some degree, reshape the ministry's role in natural resources management, something we are incredibly proud of.

It will also support economic growth and job creation, and it will allow the ministry to achieve financial sustainability over the course of the next three years. Nobody will tell you for one minute that it's going to be easy to do that, but we think we can do it in a fashion that, with the help of everyone here in the Legislature or the public, we can deliver on that.

The realization of this plan—and again, I'm glad to have an opportunity to talk about. I certainly hear people reference it a great deal. I think it will create a modern and more strategic ministry, and we are proposing some amendments to a variety of acts. I think I've got probably enough time just to go through some of the pieces of legislation that we are looking at amending, and we'll look forward to having an opportunity to discuss some of them in more detail perhaps.

The Crown Forest Sustainability Act, for example: We're going to propose amendments to that that would provide some flexibility in forest management planning and permit a shift towards more cost recovery and user-pay models.

Under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, we are proposing amendments that would allow for a reduction in the number of authorizations and licences that are required. Again, we have heard from people. We think that it has become somewhat unwieldy, so what we are looking at—and your thoughts will be appreciated—is setting some standards which individuals or organizations would then need to meet. So when we set a standard and you meet that, you are able to access your licence.

Under the Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act, we are proposing some amendments that would streamline water management planning and dam operation requirements. The proposed amendments would also allow for different delivery models, such as the opportunity, potentially, to have a private association oversee the construction and operation and the maintenance of dams, something, again, that we would love to hear your thoughts on.

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We're proposing amendments as well to the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act that would provide more flexibility in areas such as park management planning and would streamline the approvals process for even establishing a park or a conservation reserve and potentially making some changes to the boundaries.

With respect to the Public Lands Act, we're proposing amendments to allow the ministry to delegate selected functions to persons or to organizations outside of government. The amendments could, for example, allow the ministry to enter into an agreement with municipalities to manage crown land within municipal boundaries, something that we've certainly heard from municipal leaders in the past about. We think that could be something that would make our ministry run in a more smooth fashion with that kind of work and co-operation.

Clearly, one of the most important industries that we have in the province is the forest industry, which is obviously under our mandate as well. To support jobs in the forest industry in northern Ontario we're proposing amendments to the Ontario forest tenure modernization legislation we brought forward a year or so ago. Those amendments would give the sitting Minister of Natural Resources the authority to make loans to Ontario local forest management corporations. We have one pilot project set up right now in northwestern Ontario that's moving along in a very positive way. We have authority, and agreement, may I say, for us to move forward on another pilot local forest management corporation, and I'm looking forward to that as we are also in the midst of having discussions with the forest industry themselves, the Ontario Forest Industries Association, about moving to a model of enhanced shareholder forest licences as well, and those conversations are going well. These particular amendments would allow us to help out the local forest management corporations getting going.

There's been a fair amount of discussion—how much time do I have left?—about the Endangered Species Act. I want to be very clear: We are very much going to maintain our commitment to protecting species at risk while we speak about the opportunity to potentially streamline approvals and permitting. I know there was a private member's bill last week that was brought forward by my critic. While I had real concerns about that perhaps going too far, I do think that what we are looking at under the Endangered Species Act is a classic example of being able to find that balance. We talk about finding a balance. It's crucial. We need to help industry, help endangered species, protect our species, and we're going to continue to do that.

It appears I've run out of time, Mr. Speaker. Thanks so much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's an honour to get up to respond to the minister. I'm glad to hear some of the changes they're bringing out and I think they're well overdue.

I hear every day from my constituents how issues like the endangered species need to be looked at. We heard that again from the Environment Commissioner when he talked about how the ministry had basically gone overboard with what they were trying to do as far as regulation, because some of these species, although they have been in the area, are essentially outside of their habitat. So sometimes, by trying to look after every last one, really—I think his comment kind of hit home when he said that the biggest problem they have is the domestic house cat. We are chasing things that really can be perceived as a waste of time. But he brings up a lot of things that are just a good news story.

In my own riding, the crown land—we have a long stretch of about 40 kilometres between Cornwall, South Stormont and South Dundas that's been sterilized by Ontario Hydro with the Seaway. This is land that's growing up now in just brush along the water, the St. Lawrence River, which would be a real asset to that municipality if it could be used for even parkland, which is in short supply. It could be turned over and developed and generate assessment that would help the township out in many of its bills.

I would also comment, not on this—something that the minister said—but something said by the member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan when he talked about inheriting the deficit. I'd like to remind him that really the deficit was zero when they came in, but it was overspent. That was just a warning sign of what we can expect from this government when they drove that spending up to more than \$4.5 billion. I think the people of Ontario deserve better. They deserve the truth, and that's something we've been—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you to the Minister of Natural Resources for your comments. However, I kind of find it interesting that you're looking for our input and consultation now, kind of at the end of the process, where historically there would have been public hearings before the budget was set. The budget might have looked very different had that happened.

There was no public consultation. Basically, the public was ignored, with the exception of the NDP's outreach to about 50,000 people. There was no input or consultation with the non-profit sector, but I think there was potentially some consultation with the business sector, because certainly in question period each day, when the budget issue comes up, we hear the Premier or the finance minister speaking to the wide support that businesses are giving this budget. So that leads me to believe that they were consulted when the rest of us weren't.

Now, people in my riding and people in many of yours are not happy with this budget. Even with the amendments that we were able to make to the budget, they're not happy. Seniors are falling behind, 100,000 seniors living in poverty, many of them accessing food banks in this province. People on ODSP and OW—although they are getting a 1% increase, what is that? Five bucks a month. You know, the increase in the cost of milk will eat up that \$5 a month for people on ODSP or Ontario Works. So people are struggling in low-paying jobs that this budget is not going to support. I read an article, actually, in the paper last week about a man who was doing six jobs to try and earn \$30,000 a year here in the city of Toronto. That's shameful.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's always a delight for me to listen to the member from Thunder Bay—Superior North, the gentleman who's doing such an incredible job as the Minister of Natural Resources for this government. I know he's been in my community on several occasions. We have a large contingent of MNR employees at Water Street in Peterborough. The minister took the opportunity to visit with them and solicit their opinions and use their expertise in the field to formulate the kind of plan that he's bringing forward in that ministry.

But I want to touch upon the great work that he's been doing along with his colleague the member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan. I just did a bit of quick research here. In 2003, Bombardier in Thunder Bay employed 250 people; right now, Bombardier in Thunder Bay employs 1,400 people. That's a dramatic increase in manufacturing, and that was brought about by having a competitive tax structure in the province of Ontario. Bombardier, who could locate in any country in the world—they have operations around the world—chose to make a considerable investment in Thunder Bay. When you go to Thunder Bay today and you visit that Bombardier plant that is building subway cars for all over the world, you see a skilled workforce—second to none—and you can see the fingerprints of the two members from Thunder Bay—Atikokan and Thunder Bay—Superior North putting the right policy framework in place to push forward the expansion of Bombardier and creating those high-value jobs that are so important to the people of this province.

Somebody asked me about the deficit, the member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry. The reason we have the deficit? We borrowed money; we borrowed money to save General Motors and Chrysler. If we hadn't done that, there would have been disastrous consequences for many communities right across the province of Ontario. It was the right decision to do that then.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm very pleased to add a few comments with respect to the remarks that were made by the Minister of Natural Resources. I did listen very carefully to what he said, and a lot of the things that he talked about with respect to some of the amendments that

fall within the purview of his ministry make a lot of sense: streamlining procedures, eliminating things that don't make sense any more.

We did have a very good private member's bill that was brought by my colleague last week, the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, that made some amendments, and it was passed, actually, which was very pleasing to all of us. But I think that also helps to streamline some of the processes and procedures that are no longer necessary.

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But I would like to also speak about his comments concerning the development of the Ring of Fire. I think that last week's announcement certainly was very welcome, and we welcome anything that moves this project forward, because this is a project of huge potential for the province of Ontario. But I would say that anything that's happening in this area is really happening despite this government efforts, not because of them. It's really quite disappointing that there is a coordinator that apparently hasn't done too much. This is something, a huge chromite deposit, that can really bring jobs to the north, particularly to our First Nations people. It's really, really important to develop that to replace the jobs that we have lost, particularly in the forest industry, over the last number of years. Let's face it: This bill really doesn't have any kind of a jobs plan, not for the Ring of Fire development or for anything else.

We continue to lag behind the rest of Canada with respect to our unemployment rates. This has been going on for some five years now. It's really too little, too late. And now we have a council that has been recommended, a Jobs and Prosperity Council. Certainly that's a good idea, and I'm sure that Mr. Nixon is going to do a very good job, but why hasn't this government been on this before? This is something that should have happened years ago. We know that we lag behind in productivity, we know that we lag behind in innovation; it's time to get moving.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time available for questions and comments. I return to the Minister of Natural Resources for his reply.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you very much. I want to thank the members for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, Welland, Peterborough and Whitby-Oshawa. I wish I had a bit more time to respond.

Let me respond to the member for Welland first. By no means is it the end of the process. We're in a position where we are bringing forward enabling legislation. If the budget bill is passed, we are then able to move forward with consultations and discussions with all of our stakeholders and with the public. We look forward to doing that. We do quite seriously invite your thoughts on all aspects of the process. We really believe that this transformation in our ministry is incredibly important, and we want to make sure we do it right. We're going to maintain our core principles, and nothing will change that. As I say, any regulatory changes that go through, they will be put in the Environmental Bill of Rights registry. There

will be an opportunity for public comment. I just wanted to address that.

The member for Peterborough, I can't resist—well, thank you, because you're so right in terms of the opportunities that we're seeing with Bombardier. I appreciate your noting that. My colleague from Thunder Bay-Atikokan and I are very, very proud of the incredible amount of employment that's come to Thunder Bay. This is as a result of this government's commitment to public transit, something the previous government completely abandoned. I know that the member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan and myself, for Thunder Bay-Superior North, are looking forward to more good news related to Bombardier, in fact, we hope very, very soon.

Quickly, if I may, to the member for Whitby-Oshawa, here we have an investment by a company of \$3.35 billion in northern Ontario and 1,100 direct jobs, 2,000 or 3,000 indirect jobs and the opportunity to massively expand the supply and services sector, which is already a huge, \$5.5-billion to \$6-billion industry. So I think this is great news for northern Ontario. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: I'm pleased to speak to Bill 55, Strong Action for Ontario Act, although I think that's a bit of a misnomer, because if you're going to add \$2 billion more to this act, you needed to be taking \$2 billion off, not doing this and extending it out to 2017-18.

I want to take a few moments to just dispel the whole spin that the Liberals have spun, the disingenuous and inaccurate depiction of the PC approach to the 2012 budget. Our leader, Tim Hudak, and our finance critic, Peter Shurman, did in fact meet and offered many ideas, bold, decisive ideas to address the unfortunate and stark reality of our dire financial situation. The Premier and the finance minister unfortunately dismissed these ideas, and I would suggest, without any true consideration; this, combined with the fact that the budget failed to take the action required to prevent the \$30-billion deficit we're heading towards and is doing nothing to create jobs in the economy. More so, the budget failed to create jobs and stimulate the economy, and at precisely the time we need to make Ontario more competitive, this budget kicks the can down the road in government debt and throws up a brand new, \$1.5-billion roadblock to job creation by cancelling the tax cuts for business.

Mr. Speaker, at this moment, Ontario is in terrible financial shape. This is pretty clear—well, it is to most people. The Liberals seem to think that a \$30-billion deficit and doubling the debt is okay. After years of missing deficit targets and spending money it didn't have, this government has arrived at a crossroads: tax increases or cutting expenses? I think we're probably going to see more of the former than the latter.

When it comes to slaying out-of-control deficits, such as Ontario's shameful \$15-billion deficit, projected to go to \$30 billion, we know we have to tame the beast that eats up half of our treasury's revenues: public sector wages. You will recall that Dalton McGuinty failed to

deliver a voluntary wage freeze in 2010, so why should we believe and trust him that he will do it this time? For this reason, the government must immediately legislate a freeze on the wages, benefits and pensions of all 1.2 million public sector employees—no more pitting non-union versus unionized employees.

Furthermore, public sector pay and benefits have to be aligned with the private sector pay and benefits schedule. Everyone should be treated equally. If we don't, then our treasury faces an even bigger predicament—a \$411-billion debt that would require deep and severe spending cuts to public services. A wage freeze could save taxpayers \$2 billion annually.

What would seem like a no-brainer for this 2012 Ontario budget, considering the predicament they've dug us into, was not so to the governing Liberals, who are too stubborn to give up their voluntary approach, which can only be described as a failure to get our fiscal house in order.

In a pre-election report by auditor Jim McCarter, he stated, "Most collective agreements negotiated since have still resulted in wage increases"—not decreases; increases, Speaker—proving the Liberals' plan to be both time-consuming and costly to the Ontario government. Numerous pressing fiscal circumstances signal that there's more that needs to be done—much more, and today, not five years down the road. Currently, more than half of all public expenditures are public sector wages. The total amount paid to workers has increased 46% since 2003. It cannot continue, Speaker.

With a growing deficit, the government is unable to focus on priorities such as economic growth or protecting core services such as health care and education. Heavily indebted governments, such as the Liberals are today, cannot afford the things they need to expand, invest or relocate to, such as competitive tax rates and good infrastructure. Having sparked a credit downgrade—two, actually, in the last month—is more than enough feedback that this government needs to rein in the public sector payroll and spending in general.

Ontario's public sector wages seem even more out of control when compared to the sacrifices made on behalf of their private sector counterparts. The private sector has had to cut back; however, the public sector earns 27% more, according to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

Interjection: They know.

Mr. Bill Walker: They do know. They've got stats and the facts; it's something we should try.

Interjection: That could be fixed.

Mr. Bill Walker: It can be fixed, it should be fixed, and we will fix it at some point.

The proposed negotiations allow for exceptions to be made to various parties. If exceptions are given to all parties, then how will we get any closer to eliminating any portion of this monumental deficit?

The Liberals keep stalling for time with excuses in the face of these substantial economic deteriorations. Yes, we've gone through a decline in the economy, but so has

every other province, and yet we are in the worst shape of all. At the end of this, if they do not make drastic changes, we'll have more debt in this province than the rest of Confederation—absolutely despicable. The truth is that the Liberals' 2012 budget continues to lack any tool to ensure that a wage freeze occurs for anybody.

Another significant issue is the fact that 600,000 Ontarians are unemployed. The number one thing the government can do is create jobs and grow the economy. Simply put, this can be achieved through balancing the budget and paying down the debt if they have the conviction to take strong, bold and decisive action, not bringing the government to the stalemate that it is at right now, and dithering and moving all of our debt out another five years to try to buy another term in office.

The Ontario PCs are proposing more than one active change towards kick-starting the economy and creating jobs by first balancing the budget and thus reducing the size and cost of government. This will effectively encourage businesses to expand and hire. At the same time, we recognize the need for a more competitive business environment, which can be achieved through a lower business tax rate—again, a decision that could have been made very easily and had a huge benefit, but was outvoted.

If the Liberals want to create jobs for the more than half a million Ontarians out of work, they must enable the environment that attracts businesses and encourages investment. Reducing the tax burden is another step in a positive direction—one the Liberals, again, chose not to take. Unfortunately, the 2012 Ontario budget does the opposite by cancelling the legislated business tax reduction and creating a new tax bracket for entrepreneurs and individuals with investment capital. We have to be very cautious to not chase those people with money who want to take risk, who want to invest their capital in our great province.

As a result, job-creating businesses took a double hit in the budget with higher taxes and a counterproductive high-income tax bracket, and I would be remiss if I didn't add a 46% hydro increase, which is driving more businesses yet again out of our province. This drives investment capital and entrepreneurs away from jurisdictions where it has been tried.

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Queen's Park, and more pointedly, the Liberals, need to acknowledge the scope of the crisis Ontarians face. The budget already details a shrinking working-age population due to aging demographics. It is unnecessary to further add to the burden by making Ontario less attractive with higher tax rates. By reducing the business tax rate to 10% by 2013, Ontario can rival competition such as British Columbia and Alberta—booming Alberta—which have already reduced their rates to 10%.

The Ontario government must push for future job creation and enable struggling businesses to thrive by, as an example, making energy affordable, modernizing the apprenticeship system to create 200,000 new skilled-trades jobs and permanently reducing Ontario's 386,251 pieces of regulation by at least a third.

Energy is the cornerstone of economic growth. The government can achieve this target by cutting off subsidies to the production of electricity in Ontario. We know the subsidies are driving up the cost of electricity and making this essential service unaffordable for the average Ontarian, and driving those businesses I referenced earlier out of the province.

You will recall the most recent Auditor General's report found that Ontario was actually paying other jurisdictions almost \$2 billion to take our surplus energy, thus making those entrepreneurs more competitive against our own manufacturing sector. So why are the Liberals approving more power sources—and intermittent, I might add—while continuing to subsidize the production of electricity and paying others billions of dollars to take our excess energy? This is not a common-sense approach to managing either our taxes or our long-term energy needs.

Speaker, let's just talk for a moment about the state of rural Ontario, where I'm proudly from, where unemployment is consistently lower than in urban centres. While the unemployment can be contributed to the aging demographic, it does not help that the policies of this government keep driving young adults out of rural areas and into metropolitan areas. After nine years of Liberal rule, Ontario's rural communities are looking more like ghost towns and less like the economic engines they once were.

Our jails are gone. Our abattoirs are gone. Our small businesses are bracing for more regulatory burdens. The B&Bs, for example, are facing challenges with the implementation of Ontario's new water regulations, forcing some of them to consider going out of business.

Our tourism industry is being challenged by the proliferation of industrial wind turbines, turbines that rural Ontario does not want. But rural citizens can't stop them because your government, the Liberal government, has taken away our right to have a say in these development projects and, I would suggest, our democratic right.

Now you're shutting down rural Ontario's horse racing industry, the second-largest job creator in the agricultural sector; 60,000 jobs are at stake and \$1.1 billion in revenues that seem to just get left off of most of the talking points.

Speaker, much of rural Ontario continues to be up in arms. This will impact our urban cousins, in time. The cost of food, the cost of energy and the lack of jobs is not restricted to rural Ontario.

I think municipal leaders made their distaste of your regime pretty clear when they walked out of Premier Dalton McGuinty's speech at the Good Roads conference last February.

Speaker, this budget did not address the three fundamental things that Mr. Shurman and Mr. Hudak went to talk about: reduce spending, which was way out of control; ensure that there's an actual jobs plan, a plan that produces, not just defers down the road; and reducing our debt so that we don't put our burden on to our kids and our grandkids and these great pages in your front row, for generations to come.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Again, though I have great respect for the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound—I know that we have a vision that we want to see Ontario in a better place, but our vision of how to achieve that is quite different.

Where it comes to the public sector, it troubles me that we always look to the hard-working people of Ontario, and we look at them and say there's something wrong with that: "There's something wrong with hard-working people being paid a living salary. There's something wrong with that." What's wrong is having public sector CEOs making millions of dollars. That's where we need to cut, not the working people who are working in offices, working in outside facilities. Those people need to be protected. In fact, we need to encourage the private sector to increase their wages, not say, "Let's cut the wages for the public sector because they're doing okay." In fact, they're not doing amazing; they're just doing okay.

We need to look at other things in terms of progressive taxes. Let's look at Manitoba. Manitoba has a small business tax of 0%. So if you make up to \$500,000 as a small business, you have 0% tax. But if you're a corporation making billions of dollars, you have the regular corporate tax. That's a progressive way of looking at addressing the fact that small businesses create jobs in Ontario—create jobs everywhere. And if we targeted our taxes to encourage job creators, to encourage small businesses, that would be a progressive step to addressing the job issue as well as addressing the revenue side.

It's addressing what really comes down to fairness. We look at this society, and we need to encourage more fairness. We need to encourage more responsibility. Those who have exorbitant profits need to share as a part of their civic duty, and those who are just getting by need to be protected, and small businesses need to be encouraged. That's the direction we should be heading in.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound for his comments. He made a reference to a \$30-billion deficit. I think it's important to remind people that that, in fact, is not the case. That's a number that Mr. Drummond referenced would be the case four or five years out if nothing was being done, and of course, that is simply not the case.

Mr. Grant Crack: Tories mislead.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I also remind members that the commitment to get the province back to a balanced budget position—our commitment is 2017-18. In the election in October, six or eight months ago, the commitment of the party opposite, the official opposition, was exactly the same.

As well, when speaking about budget issues, in this particular bill—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize. I'd like to ask the member for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell to withdraw his unparliamentary comment.

Mr. Grant Crack: Withdrawn—apology.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I return to the member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan.

Mr. Bill Mauro: As well, I would mention the member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry made a remark as if, when they were concluding their term in office in 2003, they did not leave the province with the \$5.5-billion deficit. His language was unusual, I must say. It's not a government number. It's a number from the Auditor General of the province of Ontario: a \$5.5-billion deficit. We brought in legislation so that an incoming government and the taxpayers of the province of Ontario could not be fooled like that again. That \$5.5-billion number, in fact, would have been \$8.5 billion had the Conservatives not sold a public highway just a very short time before the election. That \$5.5-billion number would have been an \$8.5-billion number.

I understand for the Conservatives that it's difficult coming to taxation issues. We're the government that has reduced corporate income tax to a very competitive level. We've lowered the small business tax rate by about 20%. We eliminated the capital tax. We brought in the single sales tax. In northern Ontario, we're the ones that are bringing the northern business education tax rates down to the provincial average, left there by the Conservatives when they were in power for six or eight years.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I've got to say, Speaker, I just wonder what the flavour is of the Kool-Aid they serve at that caucus.

This debate has deteriorated to a point where we're listening to the speaker from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and then we listen to a plethora of comments that are really directed one member at another, two minutes at a time. I don't really understand it. Maybe we've kind of run out of steam.

Let me just say this: The member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound is a new member, relatively new, elected last October. We're very happy with the addition of this member to our caucus. I was a seatmate of his predecessor. The former member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound also made a contribution in a very different way. We miss him, but we're very welcoming of this member, because he understands what it is we're up against here.

He spent a fair amount of time talking about our proposal for a wage freeze, a freeze for all broader public sector workers. You know, it's rather interesting that we presented that idea back election time. We pressed it very hard with the government in discussions that they would prefer to stop having had with us before the budget. Now we see the same government looking to embrace a public sector wage freeze. I find that rather strange—positive, if they really want to get their arms around it, because it's something that not only is required to save the kind of money that we have to save and stop the bleeding in the broader public sector and the \$55 billion that it's now costing per year to operate that; but the fact of the matter is, we have to stop things somewhere. In my conversa-

tions with people in the broader sector, they would welcome it. They understand, generally speaking—people I'm speaking with—that a two-year hold is not really very different from what's going on in the private sector. They're prepared to do it.

What do we get instead? We get a selective but across-the-board cut on fees in the medical profession that threatens some of the specialties that we depend on.

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I think this government's got to wake up and smell the roses and understand that there are problems that this budget is leading them into.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound for his comments.

I want to talk a bit about public sector workers as well. I was a public sector worker for about 20 years, and these people work really hard. These are the people who work shift work. They are the 24-hour-a-day workers. They work shift work in their hospitals; they put their lives at risk fighting fires; they put their lives at risk in domestic disputes if they are policing; they are people who work weekends to keep our communities running. I thank God we've had public sector workers during this recession, because many of them were married to people who worked in the private sector who lost their jobs. If we didn't have public sector workers, we'd have had a lot more people on the Ontario Works rolls. I know in my community the numbers doubled during that recessionary period. So I don't know that we need to try and balance the budget on the backs of public sector workers. That has happened many times over the last 38 years that I've been working. I think that we need to be respectful of them.

With respect to the arbitration process, we're now trying to change the arbitration process. Well, many public sector workers don't have the right to strike, so their alternative is to go to arbitration, and if we try to neutralize that process, then we're going to have to give them back the right to strike. Otherwise, there's no point in being in a collective bargaining process, if you don't have the right to exercise your option to strike and if you can't get a fair settlement at the bargaining table or you can't go to arbitration to make that happen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Again, I'll remind the members that questions and comments are intended to relate back to the member who has given the presentation and speech, and I think it's important, again, to point that out for the second time this afternoon.

I'll return to the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Speaker.

Ontario needed and needs a responsible budget to reduce the cost of government and focus on job creation, but that's not the path of this Liberal government. The 2012 budget includes spending increases that will steer

the province toward a \$30-billion deficit and a \$411-billion debt while more than half a million people remain out of work, a supposed austerity budget that sees 14 of 24 ministries getting increased spending despite expenses exceeding revenues by \$15 billion. This deficit is three times the size of all other provinces'. These numbers, bluntly put, are a threat to Ontario's economic security and further thwart public sector job creation.

So I think the members on the opposite side of the House need to borrow from our common sense ideas: Fix the apprenticeship system to create 200,000 new skilled trades jobs; treat affordable energy as a cornerstone of economic growth, not as an experiment; lower taxes on job-creating businesses; balance the budget by reducing the size and cost of government. Live within your means.

The cost of delaying these immediate measures is only adding to our deficit and to our debt. At \$29 million in daily interest fees to service a monstrous debt, we cannot afford to delay changing the path the Liberals have put us on. We must take a new path, a bold and innovative path, a PC path. The future of our children and grandchildren is at stake. We must act now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's my honour to rise to add the voice of my constituents to the debate on Bill 55.

On March 27, we were presented with a budget entitled Strong Action for Ontario. Once again, kudos to the title department at the government document division. I would have called it A Document Designed to Divide—to divide urban and rural, north and south, rich and poor.

We were faced with some tough choices. We could have walked away, thrown our hands up in disgust, used all the same tired, worn-out lines, and forced another election seven months after the people of Ontario sent a minority Parliament to Queen's Park to work together. But we decided to roll up our sleeves and try to make this budget a little fairer for all Ontarians. Ontario is facing a deficit and debt problem. We all know that. We believe that all Ontarians should share the burden in shouldering the load to rectify the problem.

The government wants to focus the restraint on the middle- and lower-income classes, especially the people at the bottom of the income pyramid, essentially further dividing the rich and the poor, a division that has been growing ever wider. We believe that everyone should pay their fair share and the proposals that we put forward and that the government ultimately accepted went a little way towards doing that.

Do we believe that the more fortunate members of our society should pay everyone's freight? No. As a small business owner who risked everything several times during my career, I certainly believe that risk takers and job creators should reap the rewards of their efforts. But contrary to the fearmongering of some, a 2% surtax on personal income of over \$500,000 will not cause a mass exodus of people from Ontario. I am certainly not in that tax bracket, but I want to pay my fair share, as do they, I am sure.

This budget is sorely lacking in several areas. One of those is job creation or retention. In fact, some of the initiatives it contains are the exact opposite: job-killing. A good example is the cancellation of the revenue-sharing agreement with the horse racing industry. This program created thousands of jobs and actually made the government money, something that you would think would be important when fighting a deficit and coming out of a recession. But once again, without warning, the program was cancelled, once again causing a division between rural and urban, or creating a bigger one.

Both the government and the official opposition were feeding that fire. We were lobbied heavily by many in the industry to bring down the government to stop this decision. But would an election have solved it? Perhaps in their comments the opposition can clarify whether or not they would reinstate the agreement if they formed government. It would be interesting to know. We did the best we could to provide a transitional program to soften the blow from what we still believe is the wrong decision.

There are other agricultural cuts in the budget. The risk management program, which producers from across the province fought for, was capped. We are now at a profitable part of the crop cycle, so this change is going to go largely unchallenged until the inevitable crash, and farmers will wonder what became of the program they fought so hard to create. One change that should be made right away is that the program should be stand alone so that funds don't further disappear in the budget-cutting process.

There are other issues, the potential of which have yet to be recognized by the people of Ontario: the privatization of ServiceOntario and the deregulation of regulatory powers throughout the public service. Has the government not learned anything from the ongoing scandal at Ornge? We have seen the results of the privatization six-pack and the resulting hangover, but instead of moderation, it would appear the government has decided to go for the party pack or even the keg size on privatization. They're trying to slip it by in technical jargon in sections 28 and 16, but the results will be more problems. Privatization does not save money. In the end, it creates situations for greed and graft.

Once again, as a small business person, I believe that a person who takes risks with his own money should reap the benefits of those risks if they're successful, but people should not be allowed to take risks with the public's money and trust, and that is what the budget is encouraging and it has the potential of creating more Ornge-type scandals.

I would like to focus on the ways that the budget will impact my riding as an example of what the government has done to further divide the north from the south. The divestment of the ONTC is a very good example of that concerted effort. For four years, northerners participated in the government's northern growth plan consultation process, which included a transportation component.

As president of the Temiskaming Federation of Agriculture, I, as did many others, put a lot of work into this

proposal, even though we all had become cynical. Government growth plans in the north typically follow the election cycle: release plan before election, consult after election and release plan before next election.

In reality, northern growth is dependent on the boom and bust of various commodity cycles: gold, nickel, wood fibre and even wheat. But this plan was different, we were told. This was a 25-year plan, no politics involved in this one. So just in case this was the real thing, we took it seriously. And guess what? Not once in that process did anyone bring up the topic of divesting the ONTC. Northerners would have appreciated the chance to consult on this issue. We would have had lots of suggestions on how to make the ONTC work better for all of us. But no, the government just announced its divestment—a nice word for yard sale. We have heard several times from the Minister of Northern Development and Mines that this is not a foreclosure but a divestment. Once again, high marks to the Liberal spin department. In northern terms, it's a yard sale.

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It has come to my attention that most Ontarians, including some members of this House, do not really know what the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission is. It owns—no, actually we as Ontarians own the rail lines north of North Bay, the passenger and freight equipment that run on those lines, the fibre optic cables that run along that line that serve northerners, ferries and a railcar refurbishment shop in North Bay. These services are owned by the province because, at the time, no one in the private sector could or would provide them, and we believe that has not changed. So the Liberal buzzword “divestment” actually means “sell what we can and close the rest.”

Without passenger service, how will people like Lise Lachapelle—and I have a whole letter from her about how she has a son and they've had to take the train so many times. I don't have the time to read the letter. The son can't be on a bus for 12 hours; he needs to move around. And she doesn't want to drive around in Toronto. She's gone 20 times for operations. Not once in this divestment process has anyone explained how that's going to be replaced, and that is a crucial problem, because you know what? Public transportation is subsidized all over the province. The only place it isn't going to be subsidized is us, and they wonder why we're upset.

What about the freight side of the ONTC? Who will pick that up? If no one does, what will that mean? More trucks on Highway 11, more accidents, deaths and road closures. A road closure in our part of the province—we've got the one part of the Trans-Canada Highway where there's no detour. If the road's closed, no one is getting by. We're isolated.

What about the employees of the ONTC? We were all shocked about the actions of Caterpillar in London, but they were a private company. ONTC is not; it's Ontario. So we are treating the employees of the ONTC and the clients and customers of the company like second-class citizens. We get the feeling—and people wonder why

northerners get upset. Well, I guess because we're only northerners.

Then somebody will say, “Well, John, why didn't you vote against the budget?” We could have voted down the budget. But we've got two parties that both want to sell. So voting against the budget wouldn't have solved the problem. We're hoping that the government does come to their senses because we're in a big fight on this one.

I'm going to end this on one of my favourite topics, and it's actually part of the budget. It's bears, because they're going to gut—and they're doing a lot of gutting. I'm glad you're back, Minister Gravelle, because with the Bear Wise program, I know we're taking out the technicians—we had a real big problem with bears in 2007. I'm a farmer, and I have a couple bears in the back 40 all the time. We get along fine. They eat a bit of my grain, eat a bit of my corn, have a good life, and I enjoy watching them.

But, in 2007, I didn't have one or two; I had like 40 or 50. I called the Bear Wise program and they said, “Oh, no, that can't be because bears are territorial.” That's what they told us all. So you know what we did? We started shooting, and we didn't report because we were told those bears didn't exist. That's a problem that's going to happen because when people no longer have faith in the system, when people no longer have faith in endangered species, when they no longer have faith in the Bear Wise program, we're going to do what we have to do, and we're not going to report them. You're going to lose focus on what's actually happening. By transferring it to the OPP, all you're doing—if you call 911, they're going to do the same thing, shoot and shovel, but then the cost is going to go to the municipality because the municipalities pay. So you're just transferring on that one. You're just transferring the cost from one taxpayer to another. So I'm really glad you're here because that's an issue that we should have a long discussion about.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mario Sergio: I have enjoyed the presentation by the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane. He touched on a couple of things that are very interesting, especially the economic situation, jobs and the last comment with respect to municipalities and various transfers and so forth.

I know the member is new, but I have to say that since we have taken power, the municipalities have enjoyed more uploading than ever before. We have given not only the uploading benefits but also the decision-making process. We have given them more power to spend whatever money the province was allocating to municipalities, including money for infrastructure, which is in the billions of dollars. We have said that they are the ones who know best where the money should be spent, which project is ready to go, where they can create more jobs quickly, and we gave them that authority.

Let me say that when it comes to jobs and the economy, in April we created some full-time employment of 23,000 jobs, with 30,000 part-time jobs less. Ontario

unemployment is down to 7.8%. The March jobs increase was 46,100; the 2011 jobs, 121,300; and net jobs since 2003, 547,000 jobs—since 2003. That is a commitment that we have made to create jobs. I think we are continuing building on that very strong foundation that Premier McGuinty initiated some time ago, and I think we are in the right direction. I hope that they will support, indeed, the budget and go on with the application of those regulations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I very much appreciate the opportunity to comment on the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane's debate.

First of all, in regard to the bear issue, he was talking about the territorial aspect. I just wanted to let you know that bears are very territorial when there isn't an abundance of food. The difficulty is in some places where there's strong competition, but the problem comes into place now where, if you go to dump sites, you'll see a large number of bears. I've been to Foleyet—I assume the member knows about Foleyet—where you see 30 to 40 bears at one site. That's because there's an abundance of food there and they don't have conflicts or problems and all of them get along. It's very much similar to what takes place when people go watch the brown bear on the west coast, where they stand in one area and there are so many bears there that are so large. That's because there's an abundance of food and they don't conflict with each other and they get along.

So you're going to find that where there's an abundance of food—and the spring bear hunt actually is a negative reinforcement aspect, where bears, once upon a time, were negatively reinforced to stay away from people during peak periods of time, being the summer-time, when people were out in the fields or in the bush or on the lakes and rivers etc. Now they lose that negative reinforcement.

But back to the bill that we're talking about, I hope to debate it a little bit later on, depending on the time that's allowed. Alexander Tyler, from 1887, was a Scottish professor in Edinburgh, and he went on—those who haven't seen that, just Google it, you'll find it: Alexander Tyler, 1887. He was a professor at the University of Edinburgh. He went to talk about: "A democracy will continue to exist up until the time that voters discover they can vote themselves generous gifts from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority" will always vote "for the candidates who promise the most benefits from the public treasury, with the result that every democracy will finally collapse over ... fiscal policy...."

I think that's the concern here. We talk about these things that are happening now. It's the things that need to be in place for the 2018-20 sort of time frame to ensure that the province of Ontario remains strong—and that's what we hope to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I'm glad to have an opportunity to respond to the member from Timiskaming–

Cochrane, who I know speaks always very much from the heart. We've come to know each other a little bit in this term. I know how sincerely he cares about his riding, as I think all northern members do.

I do want to reference a couple of things in the short time that I have. In terms of the Bear Wise program, the priority continues to be public safety. The Bear Wise program is continued. We of course still have our 1-800, seven-days-a-week, 24-hours-a-day hotline, and we're still encouraging, asking people to use that line. The plan has been, or the protocol has been, for many, many years that when there is an issue related to public safety, indeed we do suggest that you should be calling the police. If there's a real public safety issue, the police are the ones who can manage that. There are more of them than there are of us in terms of managing that.

We will continue to work with the police forces, particularly in situations of an emergency, and in fact, there's a situation going on right now in southern Ontario, which always draws a lot of interest, when you have a bear down in southern Ontario. Our ministry people are working with the police force, in fact, in Halton right now. So the long and the short is that if indeed a decision is made, where it's clear that there is some assistance required to potentially immobilize—i.e., tranquilize—the bear, we will still be in a position to do that. The Bear Wise program has been a real success in the sense of educating people. I appreciate the comments from the member for Oshawa as well, as a former natural resources minister.

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In terms of northern Ontario, our government, the Liberal government, is incredibly supportive. Whether one talks about the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp.—a \$100-million program, a program that, indeed, the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane's party actually took money out of in the mid-1990s when they were looking to deal with their deficit. Our incredible spending in terms of northern Ontario highways—record spending; unprecedented amounts of dollars, because we know how important that is to northerners.

I wish I had more time, Mr. Speaker, but thanks very much to the member.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Sarnia.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for acknowledging me. I want to comment and commend the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for his comments. As I talk about the bear hunt and bears and the minister mentioned about southwestern Ontario, it brought back memories. I guess it was before I got elected, now I'm thinking back. We've had two occasions in my riding, and it's certainly southwestern Ontario, when you get down on the edge of St. Clair River just south of Lake Huron. We had a moose down in our area that wandered around for quite a while and finally wandered back up north. I'm not sure exactly how far it got—I call it the north. Somewhere up in the Bruce or somewhere, it got hit.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: We're sending them down here.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, you're sending them down, perhaps. We'll feed them. Anyway, it got partway back home. It was unfortunate, but I think it got hit by a transport truck somewhere. It's unbelievable that it would have found its way down to Sarnia-Lambton somehow—I don't know how. It wandered back up north as well.

Also, we had a bear in our community which was sighted by a number of OPP officers and other members of the public. I'm sure that was accurate as well. It was just outside of Petrolia, the town where I live. This bear spent a number of days there. I think it went down to the creek bank during the daytime and had water. I don't know whether someone was feeding it or not. Over time, this bear disappeared. I don't know whether some of our erstwhile hunters may have done away with the bear. I'm not sure, but it disappeared. No one was any the wiser on where the bear ended up.

I understand what the member was speaking about. Not that we have a lot of them down there, but I could certainly see where it would be a problem in northern Ontario, where they are coming into people's fields and backyards. Another member told me that he knew a family that shot a number of them that had came out of the mountains on to their back fields.

Thank you, Minister, and thanks to the member.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I'll return to the member for Timiskaming-Cochrane, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank the members from York South-Weston and Oshawa, the Minister of Natural Resources and the member from Sarnia.

Just for the record, 99% of the time, northerners live fine with bears. We like bears probably more than anybody else. It's just once in a while, if we have a big frost or something—I live in a huge valley, 400,000 acres—and all the bears come visit.

I actually want to bring this back to the budget discussion. The biggest one is consultation. I'm going to go back to the ONTC. You make the announcement: You're going to kill ONTC, or whatever word you want to use, and then the same month, you start another consultation process. MTO just started a consultation process—it was started in Thunder Bay, Minister Gravelle—about how to improve transportation in the north. Again, how about giving northerners a true picture and saying, "Okay, here are the things we are hoping to do. Now let's talk"? Or say it two years ago: "Here are the things we are hoping to do."

You wonder why northerners get—and I think all rural people, but I'm a northerner. We hear about all these consultation processes. We participate because we think, "This might be the one." Once again, it wasn't the one.

On the northern growth plan, we all spent—individual, like the federations of agriculture—thousands of dollars going to the Think North Summit and doing all of the

things you're supposed to be doing. Yet when the really big decisions get made, it's "divestment; end of discussion."

This is before I was partisan. I'm pretty non-partisan, but this is way before I was partisan. We try, and each time, we get a wall. People are getting very, very—a pox on us all. But it's going to get ugly before it's done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for York West.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are dealing with perhaps the most important document that the government brings out on a yearly basis. It's very interesting to hear the—Peter, do you agree with me that it's the most important document?

Interjection.

Mr. Mario Sergio: No, but I would wish that you would support it. Yes, I think it's important, Speaker, because he knows better than most members of this House, especially in his role, how important this document is.

Mr. Jeff Leal: He was a talk-show host, a very good one.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Yes, and I'm sure he had plenty of opportunities to deal with issues affecting not only his but everybody's constituents.

Speaker, we look back at past governments, we take a look at the present government and we can even look into the future at future governments. I have to say—and this is by listening to colleagues on both sides of the House—there never was and there will never be a government that will appease the needs of every single Canadian or Ontarian—never. I wish that would be the case. If we were so fortunate to be so precise, if you will, Speaker, or so perfect, the good Lord would want us to be somewhere else and not in this particular House. So it is important that we, as members on both sides of this House, understand sometimes the actions of the government of the day. We have good intentions.

We come from one of the worst recessions in many, many years. I can remember the debate, for example, when a few years ago we were facing the shutting down, the layoffs of some 400,000 jobs in the auto industry, perhaps the biggest industry in Ontario. I remember the debate of those days, when the opposition said, "Don't give them any money. Close them down. Let them go on welfare." And we said, "It is unbelievable that we have to deal with such a mentality," when some 400,000 direct jobs, without taking a look at the other sectors, manufacturing parts for automobiles and stuff like that—it is all of the families involved in that particular industry.

Our Premier said, "No, we are not going to abandon some 400,000 workers and their families." And we decided to go ahead and give them a lift, so we had to borrow money. But we didn't send them on welfare. You know, Speaker, with all due respect, we can look back and say that was a very wise decision. It took the auto industry less than three years to come back, to be on top again. Not only did we save those 440,000 jobs, but now they have become, already within the term of only three years, leaders in the industry again. We are building more

cars in the province of Ontario than Detroit, than the rest of the States. So not only have we saved those jobs, we have seen the automakers increasing and opening up new plants, creating new jobs for our people. That was one particular area.

Look at the building industry, Speaker. Someone said, "We never saw so many cranes in Toronto"—more than the rest of Canada, perhaps, if you will. Those are jobs. The last month—I think it was March, if I recall well, we led in Canada, with some 46,100 jobs, and those were full-time jobs.

Do we lack in some other areas? Perhaps, but we are still continuing in the very healthy direction of providing good health, good education and the direction to create jobs, and we are seeing it on a daily basis.

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When people are working, they are spending, and when they are spending, the government becomes strong. It gets money to continue other projects. We have seen the largest investment in infrastructure, and my colleague from Timiskaming-Cochrane earlier brought up issues with municipalities. I have to say that the municipalities were so happy when we could sit down with them, and I remember the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing sat down with the Ontario municipalities and said, "What can we do to assist you during these particular very trying times in our economic situation?" We said, "We have some money. We want to give it directly to you, but we want the money to go to projects that are ready to go." They said, "Give us the money. We will put it to work. We will create jobs."

I have to say that if we look around our province, let alone Toronto and what we did for our city—if it wasn't for the assistance of this government, Toronto would be in very different shape, with all due respect to the rest of Ontario, because our people are people. It doesn't matter if they are in Cochrane, if they are in Sudbury, if they are in southeastern Ontario or Toronto or southwestern Ontario. It doesn't matter. The fact is that we have three million people, maybe five million people, in the GTA. It is the engine of Canada, without any doubt.

When we look at Canada, and when we look at Ontario, especially the manufacturing sector, we know that if Ontario is lagging behind in that particular sector, the rest of Canada is going to feel it. So it is important to move on with the debate here. It is important that we move on with approving the budget. No, it doesn't contain everything the opposition wants, but it is important that we move on so we can continue in providing the needs to our people in Ontario, especially in health care and in education.

I have to say, when we speak of education, Speaker, we're not just talking about the four- and five-year-olds, that we are giving them this wonderful lift at a very early stage; we are providing for those in college and university who are about to come out and join the workforce. They need some assistance at this particular time. When we have members saying, "Don't give them the 30% in tuition cuts," we are saying, "We have to give them that

particular assistance, because we want them to graduate as quickly as possible and with the best education so they can compete with the forces coming from the outside."

Speaker, I don't have to tell you that we can look at the Europeans, we can look at the Asians, we can look at China, we can look at Japan, and how quickly they are moving, how technology is moving quickly. I have to say that in my own riding of York West, I'm very proud of the funding we provided to York University to establish the new engineering and science building. What does that mean? It means, not only for York West, not only for those particular students, but wealth for the province of Ontario, because once those students graduate, they will not be finding—I wish that they would all be finding jobs in York West, but we know that they will be going throughout Ontario. They will move out where the jobs will be. They will be bringing that knowledge to those communities. So, Speaker, we cannot have this narrow mentality.

As I said before, and I will repeat it again, there will never be a government or a budget that will appease the needs of every member of the House. So it's incumbent upon the opposition leaders and the members on the other side to understand and say, "Let's take a look at this budget and what it does." I think it keeps us on the right track, moving in the right direction. We are applying money in a variety of ways to create jobs, and we are showing that on a month-to-month basis.

I hope that the opposition will take a good look when a vote is going to come on this particular item here, which is the budget. They will assess the content of the budget and they will really—with their heart, they will vote and say, "It is not what we want, but it is the best for the people of Ontario, and we can support it."

I thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: The member from York West, in his debate, makes a case to link jobs with his budget. There obviously is a link between economic activity and the workings of government. Regrettably, we have a debt that threatens investment and private sector job creation. When you have a very high debt like we have in the province of Ontario, and a debt that is going to continue to grow, that threatens investment in any of the infrastructure that you mentioned with respect to infrastructure that's needed to attract business and to attract jobs.

I know there was an interjection from your seatmate: "shovel-ready." Well, we have the evidence of the dollars that were spent provincially on shovel-ready stimulus projects. I have yet to see the evidence of permanent private sector jobs created by the province of Ontario's stimulus funding.

When you have a high debt like we have in the province of Ontario, you cannot cut taxes. We see this reflected in budget measures: the increase or the stalling of any tax breaks for business and a kind of a desperate measure to, as people refer to, tax the rich, which is exactly last thing you want to do in a budget if you're

trying to make any link at all between budget policy and trying to lure investment to the province of Ontario, let alone keep what we have.

However, there is a potential for this government and for the million people who work in the public service. There are incentives that could be made to ensure that our public sector helps all of us to bring back the jobs and bring back the economic activity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you to the member opposite for York West for his thoughts on the budget. He mentioned the words, and I kind of bring that to the attention of the House, “good intentions.” There’s a saying about good intentions; I’m not going to repeat it, but that’s what good intentions are. Sometimes they’re paved to the road of where we don’t want to go.

One of the good intentions maybe that the government is referring to is the privatization of ServiceOntario. I’m looking at this suggestion or proposal on schedule 28, which creates a new act, the Government Services and Service Providers Act, 2012, which basically enables the government to enter into service agreements with any person or entity or non-share capital corporation for the provision of Ontario government services. Further, the legislation enables one or more corporations or partnerships to set up the purpose of providing the service under this act.

So those good intentions we have to be cognizant of, because those good intentions are going to lead to another situation like Ornge, where we’re going to have holding companies and subsidiaries that could be for-profit or not-for-profit partnerships or public service partnerships, and there’s no structure specified for those private companies. People are expecting the government to deliver a quality service under ServiceOntario, and if they’re going to pass that on to the private sector, where is the structure with regard to that?

When I looked at this act, on page 116, in five parts of that, they talked about the word “may.” We need to have the words “shall” and “will.” We can’t leave it open to “may.”

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: My colleague from York West delivered a very good speech here this afternoon in a very articulate, straightforward fashion, and highlighted a number of things that are targeted in this budget as we move forward to balance in 2017-18.

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He noted about the construction industry, and I just happened to pick up an article here. It was in the Toronto Star of April 3, 2012, and it says, “Construction Hiring Set to Soar in Ontario,” with 120,000 tradespersons needed in Ontario over the next nine years.

It says, “Ontario’s construction industry will need to recruit an additional 120,000 workers over the next nine years, the Construction Sector Council predicts.

“Demand will be driven by mining projects in the north”—private sector—“nuclear power plant”—public sector in Darlington—“and transit systems in the Toronto region,” something I know my colleague from York West and my Toronto caucus have been cheerleaders for in moving these projects forward, “and,” of course, “the Pan American Games,” under the great leadership of Minister Charles Sousa to make sure that great event that all Ontarians will take great pride in will be on time and on budget.

The member from York West talked about those construction jobs, so important right here in Toronto. We all know that the success of Ontario is based on the success of Toronto, and driving these various projects forward, like the transit system, like the Pan Am Games, like projects in northern Ontario, will be tremendously helpful in order to keep Ontario moving ahead—and the leadership from my colleague from York West.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Harris: I’d like to respond to the member for York West briefly. I had some comments today already on Bill 55, and I’d like to share some more concerns of folks who live in my riding of Kitchener-Conestoga.

The last little while, I’ve been out speaking with residents, and they’re awfully troubled about the size of the deficit and the debt. Many members here have children. We’re passing that along to our grandchildren, Bob Bailey having those already—the member from Sarnia—of course.

Folks don’t mind paying their fair share of taxes, but they’re awfully concerned on how their dollars are being spent. Recently we’ve seen the troubling disclosure of the Ornge scandal, the waste that seems to be happening and continues to be happening in agencies such as Ornge, the eHealth scandal. I was at the hospitals recently as part of the RNAO day, where I spoke to front-line health practitioners concerned with the amount of dollars that are being spent in the local health integration networks: a lot of bureaucracy, red tape. In fact, the one in my area seems to be housed in a very fancy part of town. So they’re concerned that those dollars are being diverted from the front lines and not being spent wisely.

As I was mentioning to my colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound today about finances, we kind of use the analogy that leaving Dalton McGuinty in charge of the finances is something similar to leaving your girlfriend in the company of Tiger Woods. It’s troubling at most. Nonetheless, again, this deficit will remain basically unchanged this year. Some 14 of 24 ministries will receive increases year over year. In fact, I hear the minister from Kitchener Centre often brag about the fact that his ministry is receiving more money this year. Austerity is something they talk about a lot, but it’s clearly not in the documents.

Thank you, Speaker, for the time permitted to me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Now the member for York West has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Mario Sergio: I want to thank the members for their contribution: London–Fanshawe, Haldimand–Norfolk, Kitchener–Conestoga and my colleague from a beautiful part of our Ontario, Peterborough.

I have to say to the member that Mr. McGuinty comes from the riding of Ottawa South, I believe, and members should always be addressed by the area they come from and not by name. But I know he didn't mean it in a derogatory way.

Speaker, let me say that the money we have allocated went, indeed, for ready-to-go projects. I have a long list here which takes me more than two minutes, but I look at the Cambridge Memorial Hospital expansion; the Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital expansion in Burlington; Wellington–Halton Hills, the Groves Memorial Community Hospital in Fergus as well, Perth–Wellington, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Elgin–Middlesex–London, Leeds–Grenville—those in health care, Speaker.

Then we go to something that we can really see on a daily basis: transit and road projects. In Burlington, the rehabilitation of the Burlington Skyway; and in Barrie, in Wellington–Halton Hills, Parry Sound–Muskoka, Durham, Oshawa, Simcoe North, Chatham–Kent–Essex, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Simcoe–Grey—this is where money is being spent. This is where jobs are being created, Speaker. I know they do travel in their own riding. I know members are very active in their own ridings and they travel on a regular basis. I can see the construction. Sometimes they complain about the traffic, and it's because of the emphasis that the government has put on creating jobs. We know they are there, and I know they mean well because they know where they are.

I thank you, Speaker, and I thank the members.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I understand that the member for Kitchener–Conestoga has a point of order.

Mr. Michael Harris: Yes. Actually, Speaker, I have two points of order today.

The first: Earlier, in my remarks on Bill 55, I said that I've met several young men and women looking to get a good-paying job, a quality job in the trades, but they can't because the apprenticeship-to-journeyman ratio is 1 to 1. What I meant to say is that I've met several young men and women looking to get a good-paying, quality job in the trades, but can't because the journeyman-to-apprentice ratio is not 1 to 1. In fact, the ratio of journeymen to apprentices is as high as 5 to 1 in some trades, and our party would reduce that to 1 to 1.

On the second point of order, if possible, I will rephrase: Clearly, leaving the member for Ottawa South in charge of Ontario's finances is as bad as leaving Tiger Woods with your girlfriend. So I'd like to make that correction.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: The last point is not a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Community Safety on a point of order?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: The last point that the member did is not a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I accept that it's not a point of order, but he corrected his record at the outset.

It being close to 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1757.

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N° 53

ISSN 1180-2987

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 40th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**



**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 15 May 2012

Mardi 15 mai 2012

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Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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L'honorable Dave Levac

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Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 15 May 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 15 mai 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONG ACTION FOR ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR UNE ACTION ÉNERGIQUE POUR L'ONTARIO (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 14, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / *Projet de loi 55, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I speak today on the government's Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts. This is the government's omnibus bill to implement their budget. The Liberals call their budget Strong Action for Ontario. This budget is anything but strong action. I would go so far as to suggest that this government does not know what restraint means.

In my mind, it couldn't get much worse: a \$15-billion deficit, a \$240-billion debt and an increase in spending of \$2 billion. This is a budget that proves the Liberals have not grasped the gravity of our province's financial situation. This budget does not reduce spending, it does not reduce our deficit, it does not reduce our debt, and this budget has no job creation plan. This budget continues with total disregard for our economic realities.

The proof of this came from the world markets two weeks ago. Standard and Poor's downgraded Ontario's credit outlook from stable to negative. The next day, Moody's downgraded Ontario's credit rating from AA1 to AA2. Moody's actually warned this headstrong government in December that we were headed toward a downgrade. This means that the government of Ontario has lost the confidence of the moneylenders of the world.

The consequence of these downgrades could make it more expensive for the province to borrow money. An interest rate increase of 1% would equal a \$500-million increase in interest payments on the province's debt.

Debt servicing is already the third-largest item in the budget. Each year we pay over \$10 billion in interest payments to service our debt. Over 8% of this budget goes toward interest.

Over the last eight years, the Liberal government has taken Ontario from being Canada's economic engine to being a have-not province. Now we receive equalization payments from the federal government instead of providing them. It goes without saying that the Liberal campaign slogan "Forward. Together." isn't a good slogan for Ontario when we are at the edge of an economic cliff.

My comments today will highlight the problems with the budget: increased government spending and debt, a short-sighted energy policy, an expensive education policy, lack of a public sector wage freeze, reluctance to sell public assets and negative impacts on private sector job creators.

On spending and debt: This budget shows that the Liberals haven't found a cure for their spending addiction, as they will add \$23 billion to the province's debt. Next year, their own numbers show that the net debt is scheduled to increase to over \$260 billion.

This government is mortgaging our grandchildren's future, and they don't seem to care. The Auditor General and economist Don Drummond both have tried to sound the alarm bells to wake this government from its spending stupor. Both identified areas where savings can be made and tighter management of the public purse should be implemented.

In spite of these expert recommendations, the Liberals propose to increase spending in 14 of 24 ministries. These 14 ministries represent 82% of the budget. This budget takes us in exactly the wrong direction.

On energy: The Green Energy Act is a financial failure. Subsidizing the so-called green energy sector and paying small-scale producers up to 80 cents per kilowatt hour for their solar and wind electricity is bankrupting us. This will cost us many tens of billions of dollars over the next 20 years—this at a time when we have a surplus of electricity in Ontario that we have to sell to New York and Quebec for as little as two cents a kilowatt hour.

Our electricity costs are predicted to rise rapidly in the near future. Our homeowners can't afford it; our businesses can't afford it. A manufacturing company in North Bay paid a new fee on their hydro bill last year of \$1 million; it's called the global adjustment charge. Three years ago this charge didn't exist. It's predicted to increase six-fold in the next 10 years. This company has 250 employees and says it will have to leave Ontario if the global adjustment charge continues to increase.

The global adjustment charge was created to pay for the Green Energy Act. The Green Energy Act is driving businesses and jobs out of Ontario. The Liberal government could have purchased all the green hydroelectricity we needed from the province of Quebec for about five cents a kilowatt hour. Why didn't they do it?

On education: Full-day junior kindergarten is a great idea, but at this time we cannot afford it. As Don Drummond outlined in his report, this is a program that should not be expanded until our deficit crisis is under control. It is a \$1.5-billion cost that must be postponed.

On public sector wages: Public sector wages need to be frozen across the board until we're out of this debt and deficit quagmire. Our public sector workers will be asked to share the burden of paying our massive government debt. It's the right thing to do.

On crown corporations: Government should be doing what only government can do. All else should be left to the private sector. The Drummond report recommends that we should sell one of the casinos in Niagara Falls. I agree. We should also sell the LCBO and all other crown corporations. Government should be smaller, and we need the money.

On job creation: For the trades, we should change the required ratio of journeyman tradesmen to apprentices from the current ratio of 3 to 1 to a ratio of 1 to 1. This could create up to 200,000 new good-paying jobs for skilled tradespeople—young people.

We should have reduced the corporate income tax rate from 11.5% to 10%, as was promised by this government. This would have been an incentive to industry to invest in plants and jobs.

I would say we have a problem in this House. What we need is a select committee on Ornge to solve many of the problems on the overspending at Ornge. For that reason, I move to adjourn the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. MacLaren has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 0910 to 0940.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask all members to take their seats.

Mr. MacLaren has moved adjournment of the debate. All those in favour, please rise to be counted.

All those opposed, please rise to be counted.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 21; the nays are 30.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

The member, to continue.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Speaker, I asked for adjournment of the debate for the reason of the Ornge problem and that we have not had a select committee created yet, and we are working towards that.

We're disappointed that the government has not chosen to abide by the wishes of this House and create this committee. Unfortunately, we'll have to continue our tactics in the future.

I'll continue with my speech, if I may. I simply cannot support this budget. It does nothing to address runaway spending and ignores the problems. Ontarians were looking for a budget that was a positive alternative approach to the economic problems of this province, that offered real ideas for reducing deficits and debt, and an effective private sector job creation plan. Instead, the Liberals have put forth a budget that is being deemed a failure by respected international financial institutions. This budget is a continuation of the Liberal tax-and-spend ideology and will continue to punish prosperity and reward failure at the taxpayer's expense.

Liberal claims of a strong action budget are nothing but spin. This budget can never be called austere restraint or belt-tightening. This budget also sends a clear signal to job creators and credit agencies that Ontario is not focused on what needs to be done to put this province back on track.

For all of the reasons I have mentioned, I cannot support this budget and will be voting against it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. I thank the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills for his comments. A lot of his comments were around privatization, and certainly that isn't the way that the NDP wants to see our province going. A lot of us have seen privatization and deregulation under the Harris regime. That kind of continued under the Liberal government with respect to hydro, for example, in this province.

I know that in my own riding of Welland, where I used to sit on the hydro board as a member when I was in local municipal politics, we saw our hydro rates, which were the lowest in the province and probably one of the best hydro services with the least number of brownouts in the province—we've seen now that they don't even post where they are in the pack of hydro rates in the province. That's because under deregulation they're actually having to float money every year to the municipality, which is the sole shareholder of the hydro company.

So we're inflating hydro rates, which is an essential for everyone who lives in this province. We're inflating those hydro rates so that we can actually give money to the shareholder, and then the shareholder uses it for whatever purposes they choose to, whether that's a project in their municipality or to offset taxes. People who don't even necessarily pay residential taxes are having their hydro rates artificially inflated to support the municipalities through that deregulation process.

So I'm not in support of privatizing anything else, particularly the LCBO, where we get huge revenues to the budget every year. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Let me start with this, Speaker: I think there's a huge element of disappointment out there in the public vis-à-vis the actions of the Conservative Party. This whole bell-ringing business is a waste of taxpayers' money. I can tell you, when I'm in my community, in my riding of Ottawa Centre, people are asking me, "Why are you guys not getting some work done? Why is the budget not getting passed? Why is the anti-bullying legislation, which is so important to our kids and to our schools, not getting passed?"

They are very disappointed by the tactics the Conservative Party are taking in terms of wasting the time of this Legislature—which is extremely disappointing, because they're abdicating their responsibility, their leadership role in ensuring that as a province we continue to move forward and make great strides. Especially in these tough economic times, we need to all work together. That is the nature of a minority government, Speaker. What we're seeing from the opposition party is none of that, but just childish antics, which is extremely disappointing. I feel bad for children who come and visit this place, and the only thing they get to see is bells ringing. That's extremely disappointing on their behalf as well.

On the other hand, the other point I want to raise is that the opposition party is again all over the map when it comes to the Drummond report and its recommendations. On one hand they say that if they were in government they would implement every single recommendation, but when it comes to eliminating the subsidies for the horse racing industry, "Oh, well, we won't touch that." So there is this disagreement or discord in their position. I'd like to know from the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills: Where do they stand? The former member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills would never have that kind of contradiction in his opinions; he was a man of principle who stood for things he believed in. He served our community in Ottawa very well. I don't see that coming from the current member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills as to—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I withdraw, Speaker. But I think it's important that we know where the party stands.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Your time is over. Thank you.

Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I say to the member for Ottawa Centre that he was certainly trying to get a speed speech in there, but very little of it was accurate. One part was: He was talking about wasting taxpayers' money. What's going on in this House is irrelevant to that, but I'll tell you what is: When you start to build a gas plant in Mississauga and cancel it, and you start to build a gas plant in Oakville and you cancel it, and you go through all of those processes—we've already got things on the ground in Mississauga. We're talking hundreds of millions, quite possibly a couple of billion dollars—a billion dollars apiece—for these two gas plants.

You want to talk about wasting money and why we can't support this government and this budget? Look no

further than the seat-saver programs in Oakville and Mississauga. We could be talking a couple of billion dollars—a couple of billion dollars. And you wonder why this province is so deeply in debt and in the hole? We can't support this budget, Madam Speaker.

This was a time for a budget that brought some austerity to Ontario. What do we get from this government? We get increases in spending by almost \$2 billion, we get an increase in the debt, we get a less than 1% reduction in the deficit, and they claim they're going to have this out of the way by 2017-18. Impossible.

They want to talk about subsidies? What about the \$2.7 million that went to WindTronics in one of their ridiculous green schemes so the plant could close? They promised 200 jobs; the plant is closed. That's the kind of decisions you're getting. There are the subsidies.

You want to talk about subsidies, member from Ottawa Centre? The money they're throwing into this green scheme that is not working, is costing jobs in this province—and they're not going directly to the taxpayer; they're putting it on the hydro bill. Shameful. This government has got to go.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I wanted to address, in the budget, schedule 28 of Bill 55. It includes new legislation, the Government Services and Service Providers Act, which opens the door to privatization of ServiceOntario. The member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills was all over that with regard to selling off the LCBO and other government agencies that provide services. What that's going to do, Speaker, is that's going to open the door to privatization. This specific act will open up the door to privatization of ServiceOntario and many other services provided by the Ministry of Government Services.

0950

The new legislation allows the government to enter into service agreements with any person, entity or non-share capital corporation for the provision of government services. The legislation also allows one or more corporations or partnerships to be established in order to provide government services. This particular area in the budget is reminiscent of Ornge. When we start dismantling government services and allowing these private sectors to come in, have an umbrella of what they mentioned here, a person or entity for non-sharing corporations, and then that corporation or person or entity can then have other companies deliver the service, that is a real concern.

Is the public's interest going to be served? In this particular act, it talks about the regulations that can be imposed on these companies, but in the act they talk about "may": The government may set up a structure—may. That's not right. We have to have a "will" and a "shall" if we're going to make any changes to any act and not just leave it open to allow the companies to do as they will—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Mississippi Mills has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I'd like to thank my colleagues for their comments. The member from Welland and the

member from London—Fanshawe were both concerned about privatization of crown corporations, and I think we just disagree. As Conservatives, we should not be in the business of business; that is the business of the private sector, always, and always should be.

Government is inefficient. The trouble with government is, we have a tendency to do it very badly and very inefficiently. You look at eHealth, Ornge, we have a Presto scandal—it's going to be our next opportunity to have some excitement with the party across the hall—the Green Energy Act: These are all huge, wasteful things dealing with hundreds of millions of dollars of waste.

As far as inefficiencies, the Ottawa Centre member is concerned that we're ringing bells. That's because of what they're doing, which is nothing. They're not addressing the Ornge problem, not creating the select committee that they promised they would.

I would go on and make a few comments here. The government has failed the people of Ontario with this big-spending budget that doesn't reduce deficit or debt and is increasing spending. It has ignored the recommendations of the Auditor General and then the Drummond report.

What they should have done was cancel the Green Energy Act, cancel the full-day junior kindergarten program and cancel the Far North Act. They should have implemented public service wage freezes. They should have sold all crown corporations, again. They should have reduced the corporate income tax rate, as was promised, to 10% from 11.5%. They should have changed the journeyman-to-apprentice ratio for trades to 1 to 1 from 3 to 1. That would have created jobs, and there is no job creation program from the far side of the House. They didn't do it, and we're headed the way of the Greeks and the French. We're heading for a brick wall financially.

It is time to take this government, along with the race horses that they made obsolete, to the glue factory, where we can finally get some good out of them.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, my colleagues have brought forward the many great ideas that Ontarians have—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order.

Mr. Paul Miller: Finished, fellows? Thanks. My colleagues have brought forward the many great ideas that Ontarians have told us need to be part of any budget measures this province embarks upon. We've tried to work with this minority government to bring the best to the most, but we continually run against a big brick wall with the Liberals. It's a wall that doesn't seem to enter-tain even the smallest need of many Ontarians.

When we raise questions about the budget, the responses don't even address the issues raised, let alone give the full information that Ontarians demand.

Speaker, this minority government displays an ever-widening gap between its rhetoric and reality. The slots-at-racetracks fiasco is an extreme example of how out of touch this group across the floor is with Ontario's history and reality.

The answers given by the finance minister to questions about the sneak attack on a significant money-making agreement with the horse racing industry are quite telling. First, the minister would say that the government was no longer going to subsidize the horse racing industry, which only made us shake our heads in disbelief. Then, when he made the jaw-dropping assertion that he wouldn't take money away from health care and education to give to the horse racing industry, we just couldn't believe that he was actually spewing this stuff. When we brought forward the facts—that is, that there was no additional revenue for health care, education or any other provincial program before the slots-at-tracks agreement was made—he continued his odd rhetoric.

Then we reminded him that it was only because the horse racing industry was willing to accept slots at tracks, and communities with horse racing were the only ones willing to accept the additional gambling activity, that this additional revenue was even available. And he continued his odd rhetoric. Again, the facts appeared to have escaped his briefing notes, his memory and certainly his rhetoric. This behaviour has left many Ontarians quite concerned about the direction of this minority government and the future of this once financially sound and proud province.

While all of this rewritten slots-at-racetracks history was being recorded in this House, we had the increasingly scandalous Ornge fiasco rearing its ugly head. We have a minister who does not appear to want to take responsibility for a financial and public safety nightmare, a creation of her own government. Again, the stories that we've been expected to swallow, like "I wasn't acting as minister when this mess began to become public, because I was in an election campaign"—really? How stupid does this government think Ontarians are?

Well, I think I can tell you. The provision in Bill 55 dealing with ServiceOntario showed a government willing to re-create Ornge, but on 100 times the scale, and they expect all of us to sit back and let them go. But let's look at the bill. Schedule 28 sets out a legal framework for privatization of ServiceOntario. Schedule 28 opens up the possibility for a nightmare scenario, a scenario that might be described as Ornge times 100—that is, Ornge on steroids.

First, it enables the creation of a for-profit holding company under which would be a network of for-profit or non-profit subsidiaries. Then it allows the private sector to leverage the traffic created by offering a public service—for example, renewing your health care card or driver's licence—into private profit by trying to get you to buy additional non-government-issued products provided by a subsidiary of the new for-profit entity. So perhaps buying an additional bobblehead for your car deck isn't that bad after all. The product you initially went to this place to purchase is a government-issued product, and it is now being delivered through other than a public service. In fact, the legislation forbids that it be delivered as a public service, a service for which your taxes are already paying at a non-profit level. So already you're into the loss of already-paid-for public services.

And, Speaker, it gets worse. The legislation enables newly created companies to provide services not only on behalf of the Ontario government but on behalf of the federal government, municipalities, universities, colleges, schools, public hospitals and “such other persons or entities as may be specified by regulation”—in other words, persons such as private corporations. So all of your personal, private information is now in the hands of private corporations. Isn't that wonderful?

It's bad enough when banks have our personal information, but now the banks are also—insurance companies as well; they have that information too. Now, think of all the personal information the government has about you, from birth to death and every aspect of your life in between, and think of that being delivered by a private corporation. What's their motive? Only to make a profit, quite literally at your expense, both financially and with your privacy in jeopardy. Quite a chilling scenario, folks.

Okay, so we think that our government will set standards to protect our privacy and the costs for accessing our government-held information, but the legislation is very weak on this—as has been proven in the last five years I've been here—simply saying that the minister may—may—establish standards for the provision of Ontario government services under this act. This was a huge, huge problem with Ornge. The Auditor General was critical of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care for not setting well-defined performance measures, and here's this minority government repeating such a fatal error 100 times worse. It's a nightmare in the waiting.

1000

It boggles my mind, as the Ornge mess continues to unfold with new, daily revelations, that this group across the floor hasn't pulled all schedule 28 provisions and sat down with the opposition parties to work out a system to make restructuring of ServiceOntario a safe, long-term, workable organization. But what we do get? Fantasy about the financial impact of this selloff. ServiceOntario already brings in billions of dollars each year. What odd thinking makes this minority government think that selling it off to a private entity and having to provide profits for that entity is going to bring a better revenue stream? I think not. I think the word “monopoly” comes into mind here.

Let's not forget that ServiceOntario must provide accessible service to all corners of this province. As a government, it is our responsibility to ensure that Ontarians, even in remote areas, can get full service without having to make a 100-kilometre drive to find a government office—or a private office. Will a privatized entity be required to do this? I think not. Will you be paying double, the private profit as well as the cost of making the service available, plus your travel? I think so.

Based on the language of Bill 55, the minister may establish standards, but it doesn't require it: “may,” “shall”—not sure. There is no definition here, so I'll leave it to your thoughts, folks, on how this is going to play out.

Yesterday, OPSEU President Thomas sent a letter to the Premier—and I want to be sure that all Ontarians

have the opportunity to read this letter when they check Hansard. I don't know if I've got enough time to get it in, but I'm going to try. This is from Smokey:

“Dear Premier:

“According to the budget, your government's stated reason for privatizing ServiceOntario is because you need \$100 million from the private sector to improve online services.

“You are apparently considering investing more than twice that amount in the auto sector.

“I do not for a minute begrudge a \$240-million investment in the private sector. Ontario needs a progressive economy with an industrial strategy that provides winners. Ontarians also need quality public services. The public sector is the foundation of every modern economy.

“ServiceOntario is a huge money-maker for this province. The government operation annually earns \$2.7 billion in revenues on only \$270 million in operating costs. That's a 10-to-1 return on investment.” Show me a bank where you get that. “These revenues fund public services that Ontarians rely on.

“Why would your government give up an annual revenue of \$2.7 billion in order to obtain \$100 million?” Sounds like the horse racing industry is coming back here. “This must count as one of the most short-sighted and potentially dangerous decisions a government has ever made.

“Your government's budget implementation bill includes legislation that will enable the privatization of ServiceOntario.

“The Government Services and Service Providers Act, 2012, allows for a corporate structure that sounds like the worst excesses of Ornge.

“The act allows a holding company to be set up with a network of subsidiary companies, all operating in complete secrecy, outside the oversight of the Auditor General, the Ombudsman and the Legislature.

“ServiceOntario operations—its public counters, call centres and online services—could be sold off piece by piece to the highest bidder.

“If there is a breach in the security of Ontarians' personal information—and there are annually 48 million transactions done through ServiceOntario—no one will ever know.

“My union”—his union—“calls on your government to immediately withdraw this draft piece of legislation from your budget bill.

“I await your response.

“Sincerely,

“Warren (Smokey) Thomas, President.”

Speaker, this is a nightmare in the making. I'm going to sit back and watch it unfold, and this government is going to wear it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Ms. Soo Wong: It's a pleasure to be standing here to speak about our budget. I do hear my colleague from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, but I do want to challenge his statement this morning about the budget.

The single most important step our government is taking is to make sure our economy will continue to grow and to balance our budget by 2017. As such, we are doing everything we can to create jobs. That's our first and foremost priority.

In 2011, more than 121,000 jobs were created in Ontario, virtually all of them full-time. Our government has established—and last Friday, Minister Duguid talked about the jobs and prosperity council, with a new chair of the council, which will advise the government on a plan to boost Ontario productivity, at the same time creating jobs.

As you know, Madam Speaker, our government has taken an initiative on the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund to ensure prosperity and job creation, and to date, over 4,400 projects have been levied in that particular fund. As well, the eastern Ontario development fund—again, over 100 businesses and regional projects have been developed, leveraging about \$488 million in additional investment. Now, in this new budget we are proposing a new southwestern Ontario development fund, again hopefully to attract new businesses investing in that area and creating new jobs.

At the end of the day, in order for our government and our province to move forward, we must have prosperity through jobs. We, as a government, take full responsibility but, more importantly, working in partnership is working to bring jobs and investment to Ontario. That's what it's all about. I fully support this government and our initiative going forward, and job creation is the key, fundamental piece for prosperity for Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the comments from the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek on the budget. Of course, this debate shows the differences between the approaches of the three parties in this House.

I want to touch again on the absolute disaster that this government has created with their Green Energy Act and their feed-in tariff program. I was talking earlier about the subsidy that was given to WindTronics in Windsor, and then, of course, WindTronics flew the coop. Silicon is gone as well from Windsor. But when you talk about subsidies, people generally expect them to be done as a direct payment from the government and it is directly on the tax base so then, if it fails or succeeds, the government is at least held accountable.

In the case of WindTronics, that's the case. They gave them \$2.7 million, and they failed. The sad part of it is that on top of that \$2.7 million was the massive subsidy that the government gives to the producers of wind power in this province—far in excess of the market price of power which, since January, has been running under two cents a kilowatt hour in this province—under two cents a kilowatt hour average wholesale price in this province. But the government is not even honest enough to put it on the tax base. No, what do they do? They directly put the burden onto the hydro bills of this province so they're

not even accountable for that scandalous, excessive, obscene subsidy that they're giving to the producers of this power in this province. That is what is making it so hard for people to live in this province, and this budget gives them no help whatsoever.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you Speaker. I just want to touch on a few of the points that my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek brought up, in particular to the ServiceOntario services in schedule 28.

In northern Ontario, a lot of the business owners are basically just surviving on the bare minimum of their jobs. They're having a hard time particularly in the forestry sector, and particularly those who are operating trucks, who are transporting the wood from the forest to their mills.

Within this bill that the government has proposed, they're actually going to be increasing the licensing fees for those individuals, who are having a hard time just making ends meet right now. This is going to be the last nail in their coffin. They're going to have a very hard time meeting their bills, meeting their daily expenses and costs, and they're going to be faced with some very, very difficult decisions going forward.

Those services and those licensing bureaus where they go and obtain those services are also going to be challenged, because they're losing a lot of the services and the agreement factors that were there with this government, which are no longer going to be presented or available to them. They're going to be challenged in regard to making those services available for a multitude of communities that do not have these services readily available to them. They will now have to go the extra mile, 50 to 100 kilometres, in order to get a health card, in order to get a renewal done, in order to get some information, in order to get the services they need. It is very difficult getting these services, first and foremost, in northern Ontario, and I would hope that this government is listening and will do what they can in order to not say “may establish standards” but “will establish”—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I really appreciate the debate that's taking place in the House right now. This budget is an important document, Speaker, which is addressing and speaking to a very serious time in our economy. We are coming out of the great recession of 2008–09, and we are obviously in a place, in terms of the recovery that is taking place, where we have a strong plan moving forward to ensure that we balance the books, that we eliminate the deficit in the next five years, by 2017–18, but also at the same time ensure that very important services like health care, education and community and social services are there for all Ontarians across this great province.

I've spoken about the fact that I am, on a weekly basis, out in my community knocking on doors, canvassing on a regular basis. Just last Saturday morning, I was out in the Centretown community speaking to my con-

stituents door to door. I have to tell you, there are three conversations that come out to me, very interesting, enlightened conversations about the state of the economy, how we're creating jobs. Those are the issues that are front and centre for my constituents.

With another constituent, we talked about health care, particularly elder care, how we're going to look after our seniors. Hospitals are not really the place for our seniors to be getting care. We need to ensure that we provide care for our seniors within the community, closer to their homes, so they can continue to live as long as possible at home. Those are the kinds of things that my constituents in Ottawa Centre are interested in, and these are the kinds of ideas that we are pushing through this particular budget—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Paul Miller: I was hoping that I'd get a response to what I said, but it seemed to have gone off in another area. Usually, when a person says his spiel, people refer to what he said, but they seem to get their own political agenda in there. It's unfortunate. Anyway, it's neither here nor there. I got the points across that I wanted to, Speaker.

This is just starting to unfold. There are going to be many, many more surprises coming across to that side of the floor about ServiceOntario. This is just the start of an avalanche. I don't really think they grasp it or understand what's going to happen here. I certainly wouldn't want to be sitting over there when it does unfold.

I have tried till I'm red in the face, trying to share my ideas, share my concerns, share my amendments over the last five years, and all I got was five people sitting there doing things other than listening. But then, surprisingly, Speaker, some of our ideas show up four months later, and it becomes a government bill. Hey, if it works, it's good. If it goes through, I'm happy. But at least have the courtesy to say where you got the idea from. It didn't just drop out of the sky; the tooth fairy didn't leave it under your pillow. It came from the opposition, but they never, ever acknowledge that. That's unfortunate, because I think a good government should at least give credit where credit is due, instead of running all the way down the road waving the flag like they did it all. It really is frustrating.

Folks, this is just the start of a lot of stuff that's going to unfold in the next few weeks, and I wouldn't want to be in your seat.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It being 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jim McDonell: I wanted to introduce my EA, who's up from my riding. Marilyn McMahon is here to get some training and to enjoy the House. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Hon. Michael Chan: Today in the Speaker's gallery are delegation members from Hubei province of the People's Republic of China: Vice-Governor Zhao Bin, Director General Wang Zhongfa, Divisional Director Chen Jianhua, Vice-Division Director Ye Leping, and Vice-Section Chief Qin Wenlu. To our guests, welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce four prominent ladies in the east gallery representing the Ajax Bomb Girls of World War II. I'll introduce the four, and I would ask them to stand as I call their names, and remain standing: the committee chair, regional councillor Colleen Jordan; the treasurer and long-time Ajax councillor Pat Brown; fundraiser and past regional councillor Pat Clark; and a very special lady, the honorary patron and an original Bomb Girl, Louise Johnson.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to introduce some members of the Canadian Snowbird Association who have joined us here in the assembly today: Lois Slack, Joan Brissenden, Joan Foster, Denise Leroux, Patricia Quigley, Judy Steeves, Yasmin Thorpe, Anne Weylie, Gord Hopcraft and Bill Huestis. We welcome them to the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm delighted to introduce Tea Rosic of Lisgar, who is working with us in her third summer in the Mississauga—Streetsville constituency office. Tea attends McGill University in Montreal during the winter. Welcome.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to introduce a good friend of myself and the caucus, Kelly Harris. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I'd like to introduce my Girls Government group in the Speaker's gallery. They're visiting Queen's Park today to watch question period and give a press conference this afternoon. There are 17 girls, and their teachers are from two schools in my riding: St. Eugene Catholic elementary and Dixon Grove Junior Middle School. I hope the girls enjoy question period today.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'd like to welcome Armand, Allan, Robert, Thomas, Genevieve and Daniel Conant, and Linda Sully, who are here in the Legislature today to celebrate the birthday of the Honourable Roger Gordon Conant, who turns 90 next week. Congratulations and happy birthday.

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: I'd like to introduce again Fouzia Baki, who is our page Shaumik Baki's mother, who is visiting us yet again today. I don't see her here quite yet, but I'm sure she'll be joining us shortly.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's intern season again, and we get those bright, energetic young folks. I'd like to introduce our two interns, Fareshta Raoufi and Tahiyah Bakht, in the gallery today.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I want us to welcome two interns who have come to work in our office, who are here in the members' gallery: Sarah Crowley and Nicholas Sherwin. Welcome, and good to have you here at Queen's Park.

Miss Monique Taylor: Today I'd like to welcome the president of USW Local 1005, Rolf Gerstenberger, along with Jake Lombardo, Les Sherman, Steve Kajganic, Mauro Spaziani, Andrew Shand and Hans Nita, along with several of our injured workers' committees.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, in 1991 you said the following: "I submit I am not going out on much of a limb when I say there is a direct correlation between Hydro's rates and our rate of unemployment in Ontario. As the rates go up, so will the rate of unemployment." I agree with what the Premier said in 1991, but the Premier seems to be embarking in a different direction.

So, Premier, do you still stand by that accurate statement from years ago or have you found some way of suspending the basic law of economics when it comes to your expensive hydro policy in our province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's always good to know what happened 21 years ago, Speaker; 21 years ago.

I would say to my honourable colleague that it's important to understand what we have done working together with the people of Ontario since 2003. Having inherited an electricity system that was in a terrible state of disrepair and neglect—

Interjections: A shambles.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: A shambles is not putting it too strongly—we've undertaken to rehabilitate, restore, renew 80% of it over the course of the next 20 years. So we've been making massive investments in new generation and in new transmission. At the same time, we're investing in an exciting, new clean energy industry, which is creating thousands and thousands of new jobs.

So we now find ourselves at a point in time where we have clean, reliable electricity, Speaker, which is so important to the business community in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: The problem, Premier, is that you're trying to turn upside down the basic law of economics. You somehow believe that higher energy rates somehow create jobs, when the opposite is the case. If anything's in shambles, Premier, it's the state of our economy: 300,000 lost manufacturing jobs across our province; in April, Ontario lost 8,000 jobs while the rest of Canada added 60,000; and Ontario's manufacturing sector lost a further 13,000 jobs in April. Premier, the point here is, these are good jobs. They had been good jobs. They were a ticket to the middle class. They helped to make Ontario's middle class strong and healthy. You are undermining the middle class with your expensive hydro policies.

I'll ask you: Will you admit now that higher hydro rates are actually driving jobs out of the economy, and it's time for a change of course in our province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, presumably at some point in time the leader of the official opposition is going to talk about his proposal. Why don't I take advantage of this opportunity to clarify his position in this regard? He wants to return to a failed experiment that hit Ontarians, business and homeowners alike, about 10 years ago; it resulted in a dramatic 30% increase in our hydro rates within a period of seven months, and it saddled us with a \$1-billion debt that we continue to pay to this very day.

I say to my honourable colleague: We've been there, we've done that; we have no intention whatsoever of retuning back.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: You know, Speaker, if you want to talk about failed experiments, we need to look no farther than 10 feet there across the floor—300,000 lost manufacturing jobs; an erosion of our competitive position; and we're paying \$1.8 billion to Quebec and New York to take our power because we've signed contracts that make us take wind and solar at more than 10 times the price of power when we don't need it. You talked about a failed experiment, and the Premier wants to double down.

It's not just the PC caucus, Speaker: the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers; the Power Workers' Union; the former CEO of the OPA, Jan Carr; the Auditor General; economist Don Drummond—more and more are saying we need to reverse course and, instead, go down paths to prosperity in our province; a bold, new set of ideas to make energy policy about the economy to attract jobs in our province. Your path has failed. Try something new.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I want to make it perfectly clear here and now: We don't support selling off Niagara Falls. We think that's an important public asset that should be kept in public hands.

My honourable colleague references Don Drummond in passing. I would refer to some of the statements that he made in his recent report that he prepared for us. He specifically said, "We caution that any action must not be driven by ideology." My honourable colleague wants to return to a failed experiment. It drove up our electricity costs by 30% within a period of seven months.

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Don Drummond goes on to say, "Current circumstances do not appear to offer a convincing value proposition for" selling off our assets.

I think it's really important to be mindful not only of history and what that has taught us, but also of present-day expert advice from people like Don Drummond, who are cautioning against this very kind of proposal.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: Premier, your green energy policy is nothing short of ideology that has been proven to be a failure everywhere it has been tried. You cling to it like some sort of religious zealot when the

economic evidence is to the contrary. It is not a new idea; it is an old, outdated, 1990s-style industrial policy that began in Germany, and the countries that began it have abandoned it because they found out, as the Auditor General points out, that for every short-term job you create, you lose three or four in the broader economy.

You talk about rigid ideology, sir; it's time to move off your ideological path. Get back to some common sense and good economic policy in our province, driven as energy policy, as economic policy to attract jobs. That's the path to prosperity to make Ontario strong again and to make Ontario the leader when it comes to job creation, not the ideological—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, again, to make it perfectly clear, we oppose selling off Niagara Falls, and we oppose returning to burning dirty coal, which compromises our health and, I would also argue, compromises our competitiveness.

Listen to some of the investments that we've made and how far we have come since 2003. We have built 9,000 megawatts of new generation. We have built 5,000 kilometres of transmission; that would take us from here to the Yukon. We've invested in some 20,000 new clean energy jobs, and we're on track to create some 50,000 by 2014. That is at risk, in keeping with the proposal put forward by my honourable colleague.

I believe Ontarians want us to strike the right balance. They want clean air. They want to move off coal. They want us to invest in their system to make sure it's affordable, clean, safe and reliable. That's the balance we're striking.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, people want jobs in Ontario. They want to see an Ontario that grows again.

For 100 years, Ontario had energy rates that were lower than our competing states and provinces—for a century—until you brought in your very ideological Green Energy Act. Now we're heading for the second-highest energy rates in all of North America and the highest rates on industry.

It is time to take a different path, to move away from your expensive subsidies and government mingling into the sector, Premier. We want to see investment by the private sector into our power system to see it grow. We want to see nuclear power as the basis of our supply, not wind and solar at 10 times the price of power. And where it makes sense to import power, do so, so businesses can actually hire again and expand and families can pay the bills—and to end your expensive gimmicks like your big subsidies for electric cars, to get back to a policy that says that energy is fundamentally economic policy to create jobs, a different path, a path to prosperity.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I take issue with pretty well everything my honourable colleague has said in that statement.

I think it's important that we cut to the chase on this, Speaker. What my honourable colleague is driven by is not so much the success of our approach, or lack thereof

in his eyes; what he's really bound by is an outdated ideology. He wants to sell off public assets. Mr. Drummond made it perfectly clear that there is no case to do that. He wants to proceed on the basis of ideology to sell off public assets like Niagara Falls, and he wants to return to the burning of coal. We reject that approach. We think it's outdated. It's not in keeping with the public interest. It's not in keeping with doing what we need to do to ensure we have a strong, competitive economy with businesses flourishing, as they are at present.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Here are the facts, Premier. The average family's hydro bill has gone up 100%. You say yourself it'll go up another 50%, and I suspect you are actually lowballing that figure. Under your very ideological approach to energy, we now have the highest rates for manufacturing and industry, and that has cost us 300,000 jobs.

We have the preposterous situation of trying to power a 21st-century economy on when the sun shines and when the wind blows, and then we have to pay Quebec and New York almost \$2 billion to take our power.

Sir, your energy policy has been a failure. It is a train wreck of an economic policy. It's costing us jobs. I know it's hard for you to shake your ideological commitments, but it's costing us jobs and it's time to turn our province around. The PCs have put bold, new ideas on the table to power the economy, to create jobs and make Ontario a leader in job creation in Canada. That's the path for our province, sir, and I ask you to reverse course and get back to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, again I find it interesting that my honourable colleague has had the opportunity to put six questions to me and he references his plan as “bold new ideas.” Why doesn't he just step forward and say, “We want to sell off public assets. We want to do what we did in the past. It led to a 30% increase in our electricity rates over the course of seven months. We want to return to the burning of coal, because that's less expensive than proceeding with cleaner sources of electricity?” Why doesn't he just come upfront with that? He doesn't, Speaker, because Ontarians rejected that in the past and they'll reject it again today.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. New question.

GASOLINE PRICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. As the Premier knows, these are difficult times for Ontario families. The cost of everyday life keeps going up, while people haven't had a real increase in

wages in years. One of the big challenges for households is trying to balance their books, and one of the biggest issues that they have right now is the price volatility in goods.

Does the Premier agree that when gasoline prices spike by six cents a litre overnight, that makes it harder for people to plan their household budgeting?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, gasoline prices are a real issue for Ontario families and businesses alike. That's why I'd encourage my honourable colleague to take this matter up with the federal government, who has principal responsibility for these kinds of issues. If she's suggesting that we put in place price controls of the variety that they have in some other provinces around the country, history has demonstrated that overall, those jurisdictions, people, families and businesses end up paying more than they do in the province of Ontario. So I'd caution my honourable colleague when it comes to embracing that kind of approach and I would encourage her to contact the federal government with respect to gasoline prices.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, Ontario is the only province in eastern Canada that does not have some sort of predictable pricing for gasoline. That's a fact. This afternoon, New Democrats are putting forward positive ideas. Let the Ontario Energy Board, which already has a role in regulating electricity and natural gas prices, create a weekly price ceiling for gasoline, so that drivers have a little bit more control over the price that they're paying at the pumps. Will the Premier be supporting our proposal to help Ontarians manage their household budgets?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let's just take a look at some objective information here. Canadian cities' gas price averages: Quebec City, \$1.42; Montreal, \$1.40; Halifax, \$1.40; Vancouver, \$1.39; Toronto, \$1.30; Kitchener-Waterloo, \$1.30; London, \$1.28. I can go on, Speaker, but I think it's very, very clear that there is no magic to be found in the approach that my honourable colleague would have us embrace. I think what we have in place is the best system. It's not a perfect system, but it's the best system among the choices available to Canadians today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, by setting a weekly price, families would be able to plan their budgets. It's an idea that works in other provinces. It's an idea like the ones we've heard from—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's an idea a lot like ones that we've heard from the Liberals in the past. It'll make life a bit more affordable for people who need help. Is the government ready to make life a little more affordable for people, or can we count on more of the same old inaction and indifference from the Liberal government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, it's been said that for every complex problem there is a solution that is neat

and tidy and completely wrong. I think this is a good example of such a solution.

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Speaker, if we look at what has happened across the country, and particularly if we compare what has happened here in Ontario with other parts of the country where they have regulated their gas prices, it turns out that, in the long run, Ontarians are further ahead. I'm talking about homeowners and businesses alike. This is not an easy issue—I understand that—for families and businesses alike to grapple with, but I would again encourage my honourable colleague to deal with those folks who have principal responsibility for gasoline pricing in the country, and of course, that's the federal government.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier, Speaker. In the past, the Premier has advocated the selling off of a portion of Hydro One and at one point he actually supported plans to sell it off entirely. Yesterday, the Minister of Energy called it a "failed" and "recycled" policy. Now, I know the Premier has had a variety of different views on this, so I just want some clarification on exactly where he stands today.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, they say that actions speak louder than words, so I recommend to my honourable colleague—she's criticizing us for something we didn't do. That's hard to take, I've got to tell you.

The fact of the matter is, we have proceeded in a way that demonstrates the high value that Ontarians attach to their public assets. We have continued to build on that foundation, building more transmission, building more generation, Speaker, and there are prices associated with that.

Interjection.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I say to my vociferous honourable colleague from the north: There are costs associated with investing in new generation and new transmission. I think it's important that we be honest about that. But this system was in a terrible state of disrepair. We've invested billions of dollars, and there's a cost associated with that. We're helping manage that with our 10% reduction.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, the government criticizes the failed Conservative hydro policies of the past, but they look a heck of a lot like the failing Liberal hydro policies of today. Families paying sky-high electricity bills want to know why they're on the hook for private power deals in Mississauga and Oakville, and they want to know why the government is pushing ahead with a scheme to privatize local utilities.

If the government knows these private power schemes drive up costs and make life more expensive, why do we get more of them every single year?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The overwhelming majority of our power system is in public hands and it will

remain in public hands as long as we have anything to do with it.

We make no excuse for the investment in green energy to clean up the air, save health costs and build a strong economy here in the province of Ontario. We say to all, whether in public hands or not, that we are determined to find the most cost-effective way to deliver reliable, clean power to families and businesses. That's why we set up the panel to take a look at local publicly owned distribution companies to see if there's a more effective, more cost-effective way of doing that.

Surely the NDP would not stand in the way of a more cost-effective, publicly owned way to approach the delivery of power.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, we've been pretty clear on this over on this side of the House. When a family's hydro bill is nearly twice as high in Ontario as it is in Manitoba or Quebec, you're obviously doing something very, very wrong, and households are struggling with the growing cost of everyday life. They are paying the price of this government's failure.

We've put forward positive proposals to get out of this mess and asked the Premier to commit to a real review that would look at the role that private power is actually playing in driving up the costs. Is the Premier ready to act on this? Or are we going to see more of the same failed policies that keep people paying more and more and more?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As I say, the overwhelming majority of our power system is in public hands; the overwhelming majority will stay in public hands.

We make no apology for the investment in green energy to clean up the air, save the health of Ontarians and build a very strong economy in the province of Ontario, and no excuse for saying to all companies that deliver that resource to the people, families and businesses in Ontario, "You have to do it at the most cost-effective way."

That's why we work with all of our major publicly owned agencies, including the local distribution companies, to say to them, "If there are ways this can be done more effectively, we're prepared to do it."

I hope the NDP won't stand in the way of delivering our public resource more cost-effectively to families and businesses in the province of Ontario.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Good morning, Minister. It's becoming apparent to everyone that your green energy plan is failing. It's failing Ontario families as their hydro bills are out of control, thanks to outrageous wind and solar subsidies. It's failing Ontario businesses as rising global adjustment forces firms like Fabrene in North Bay to look long and hard about the decision to even stay in Ontario.

We've heard from ordinary citizens, we've consulted hundreds of stakeholders, and they're telling us that change is needed in the electricity sector to make Ontario competitive to create jobs.

Today, our party has issued Paths to Prosperity, which will restore an energy policy. Minister, as you have no ideas of your own, will you please take ours?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Unfortunately, we've seen your plan before. We've seen the plan to sell off publicly owned assets before. We've seen that you are desperate to take Niagara Falls and our other strong, publicly owned power assets and give them to the highest bidder. They'll never again be in the hands of the people of Ontario. We've seen what effect that has on hydro rates: a 30% increase in just a matter of months. We've seen that. The people of Ontario rejected that.

When will the party opposite actually come up with a forward-looking plan instead of just dredging things up from the past?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Minister, our answer to the energy crisis is our 13 Paths to Prosperity. Your answer is to drive hydro bills through the roof, forcing seniors to choose between heat and food, forcing businesses to close or move. We say, enough is enough.

Without dramatic changes to the electricity system, hydro bills are going up by 46% by 2015, and that is from our very own Auditor General. Today, we put concrete solutions on the table to reduce this job-killing path that you've put us on. Will you do what we did? Will you listen to Ontarians and take the steps we've outlined in our Paths to Prosperity to keep hydro costs down and start creating real jobs again in Ontario?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Unfortunately, Speaker, their 13 steps are going to take us back to a failed policy that the people of Ontario have long since rejected. We do not want the party opposite to engage in a public auction of Niagara Falls and our other publicly owned assets.

We saw what that meant with the 407, where they got a one-year gain and an asset lost forever to Ontarians and billions of dollars lost from the pockets of Ontario families and businesses.

We saw what that did to electricity rates. We saw that when they broke up Ontario Hydro, they created the stranded debt that is still there, and we're still working to pay it down. Their failed experiment didn't work then; it won't work now.

It's time—surely, Speaker—that we move forward together.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of Education. A simple question, Minister: If Bill 13 passes and a group of students wants to form a student group, and they want to call that group a gay-straight alliance, is there any possibility that they will be denied the right to name it that?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very happy to have an opportunity to talk about the Accepting Schools Act and how the Accepting Schools Act will make a difference in our province.

We used to have a debate in this province about whether, when students put up their hand and asked for support, when they asked to form a club, they would be allowed to form that single-issue club to talk about issues of importance to them in school, Speaker. That debate exists no longer. If this piece of legislation is passed, we will ensure—we will guarantee—that those supports will be in place.

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I've had a chance to say on many occasions that it's not for us from Queen's Park to tell every student what their club should be, and I would expect all of our boards to pay attention to the student voice and the value of students having a role in ensuring that those supports and those clubs are in place for those students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, occasionally evasion speaks volumes, and it does this morning. The minister does not say whether or not gay and straight students could form a club that they could call a gay-straight alliance.

Minister, you have not answered that question. You are evading that question. On one hand, you say that gay students need to be respected, that they need to have the validation that comes from legislation, and on the other hand you, in this Legislature, will not make it clear that they will have the right to name their clubs. Why will you not make that statement in this House?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: We have made it very clear in the legislation that student-led initiatives like gay-straight alliances need to be supported, be it by that name or any other name. It is many, many students in our province who want to have a voice, Speaker. They want to have support. We're focused on that support, and we have the support of many, many individuals across this province who have fought long and hard to ensure that issues regarding homophobia and sexual orientation will be front and centre in our schools so that our students, our LGBTQ students, our students who have two moms or two dads, can go to school every day and feel safe and feel respected, and they will have the supports in place.

These organizations have many names, but let's be very clear about one thing: The supports will be in place. The students put up their hands; if Bill 13 is passed, those supports will be in place for our students right across this province.

NURSES

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. As a public health nurse, I know how important it is to ensure that communities like my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt have access to more nurses. It wasn't that long ago, under a former government, that we saw nurses being fired. That trend has been reversed. However, there is still more work to

be done. There's a growing need for nurses to provide many different types of care in our schools, hospitals, long-term-care homes and at home.

To the minister: What is this government doing to provide more nurses to communities throughout Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, thank you to the member from Scarborough—Agincourt—a very strong member in this Legislature.

I am very proud to say that Ontario is making the right choice. We're directing precious health care dollars to front-line patient care and we're creating 900 new nursing positions this year. These new nurses will care for patients throughout the health care system: in home care, community care, primary care, in our hospitals, our long-term-care homes and our mental health care programs in our schools. The creation of more nursing programs to ensure the right care at the right time in the right place is part of our action plan for health care.

We now have more than 15,000 more nurses working in Ontario than when we took office in 2003—an increase of 33%.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Soo Wong: Our health care system faces many challenges. We need to move forward on house calls for Ontarians. Hospitals require more supports to shorten ER wait times. Our long-term-care homes need support for nurses who care for residents on a daily basis. More people are using telemedicine as a tool to access health care advice. And the demand for nurses to help children in our schools continues to increase.

To the minister: How will this investment in new nurses help Ontarians through the health care system?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Among the 900 new nursing positions, we've got 126 rapid-response nurses. They visit patients who have been discharged from hospital within 24 hours to make sure they're getting the right supports at home. We've got 200 new nurses to care for long-term-care residents with complex and challenging behaviours. We've got 191 new telemedicine nurses to support patients in remote areas while they receive care from specialists throughout video hookup. We have 144 new nurses working in schools to identify and support students with mental health or addiction issues.

So we are making the right choices to increase capacity in our communities with the precious new health care dollars that we have.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question is for the Minister of Energy. We heard on Friday from StatsCan with the latest unemployment numbers. As a result of your Liberal government's policies, Ontario's unemployment is up to 7.8%. In April, the rest of the country gained 60,000 jobs while Ontario lost about 8,000 jobs. Coincidentally, electricity prices in this province have risen 100% and prices are projected to rise another 46% in the next five years.

Minister, do you agree with the Auditor General that the high cost of electricity here in Ontario is costing us jobs and hurting our economy?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I know I'll give the supplementary to the Minister of Economic Development.

It's interesting that the member stands up and talks about jobs and has consistently voted against the south-west economic development fund, which in our part of the world is a very important job driver.

The fact of the matter is that, over the past couple of months, our full-time jobs are up. Since the depths of the recession, we are up many thousands of jobs—a very strong economic performance.

What we've done in energy is find a new source of employment for the future. We found green energy jobs, already more than 20,000 jobs in the province of Ontario on the way to 50,000 with billions of dollars of investment, all of which will be cancelled if the party opposite ever gets the opportunity.

It's time to support clean, reliable jobs for the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Minister of Energy: He is obviously completely out of touch with the realities that businesses in Ontario are facing.

Minister, the community of Wallaceburg has been hard hit by the recent recession. To make matters worse, on May 3, Sobeys in downtown Wallaceburg announced that they would be shutting their doors and laying off 70 employees. Company representatives have stated that, after an extensive and careful review of the operation, it was determined that the store is no longer a viable option, with a major factor being the skyrocketing increase in energy costs that are facing the store.

It is clear your callous energy policies have cost yet another 70 jobs in my riding. Minister, will you admit that the skyrocketing energy costs that your government has implemented are hurting Ontario's economy and costing us jobs?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We know what's going to happen if the PC policy is implemented, because we saw this before. There were shortages of power in 2002-03. There were brownouts. There were electricity generators on street corners, and the prices for families and businesses skyrocketed 30% in a matter of months. Businesses could not rely on the power when they had the chance. There was no certainty of supply and businesses were on the edge.

We've renewed the system. We have brought on the generation necessary. We're making sure that our public assets stay in public hands, and we're finding the jobs for the future in a clean, green economy at home right here in Ontario to provide opportunities for families and businesses throughout this province.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Budget Bill 55 establishes a legal framework for

the privatization of ServiceOntario, a framework that would allow an unaccountable, privatized, private-public system that could lead to private interests profiting from public services.

I want to remind you that it was a complete lack of transparency and accountability that led to the Ornge fiasco. Why is this government risking going down the same path with ServiceOntario as it did with Ornge?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite referenced an important budget initiative, which his party supported at budget motion time, Mr. Speaker. They didn't vote, I think is what happened.

Interjection: They didn't object.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: They didn't object.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, this initiative began in the 2011 budget. We outlined options for the better provision of services to Ontarians. We've looked at those, examined them throughout the course of the last year, and in this year's budget we brought forward a proposal that will allow us to better manage the costs associated with the provision of important public services. We believe it's the right direction for the province to go in as we get back to balance so that we can continue to make the investments in education and health care that all Ontarians value.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: The new piece of legislation contains no—I repeat, no—accountability measures and allows a labyrinth of for-profit corporations to benefit from the fact that almost all Ontarians must use ServiceOntario at one time or another. Despite the admission from this government that letting Ornge go down this path was a big mistake, this legislation replicates many of the mistakes made there. Can this minister explain why he is pushing ahead with legislation that replicates many of the failures of Ornge?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, that's not the case. I am looking forward to the passage of Bill 50, which will give greater certainty to Ontarians about the accountability of crown agencies in all of their various forms. So I'm pleased that in fact the Auditor General and others will continue to have scrutiny, as will the Legislature, as will public accounts, over this operation and other operations, as they do now.

We believe, frankly, that the passage of Bill 50 will aid this Legislature not just with Ornge but with the accountability of a broader range of arrangements between the government and the private delivery of different services and assets. Accordingly, we believe this is the right policy. It will allow us to get back to balance as we continue to make important investments in health and education.

BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Today I have a question for the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation. Recent reports have iden-

tified that Canada and Ontario suffer from a productivity gap. It's very important to note that this is not a reflection of Ontario's hard-working labour force but a gap in how we capitalize and maximize the value and productivity of our limited investment dollars.

Can the minister assure this House and my constituents of Pickering-Scarborough East that the government has a plan to ensure we maximize the productivity of our limited investment dollars?

Hon. Brad Duguid: We sure do, and I want to thank the member for the question. I'm pleased to take this opportunity to talk a little bit about the Jobs and Prosperity Council. The Jobs and Prosperity Council will advise the Ontario government on how best to improve our competitiveness and productivity. It will be an effective mechanism to seek cutting-edge advice and generate new ideas and approaches to improve productivity and competitiveness in Ontario. It will consider ways we can best other jurisdictions in the global workforce skill shortage, and it will consider how we can get the maximum results from our business support investments.

It will report to the Premier, and it will be headed by a well-respected champion of the Ontario economy, Gord Nixon. I'm confident that, with Gord Nixon's leadership, the Jobs and Prosperity Council will generate ideas and advice that will help us take Ontario's already strong economy to the next level.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: I thank the minister for the answer. As a former executive in the private sector, I am very glad to see that we're moving forward on the budget promise to create the Jobs and Prosperity Council.

I'm also very happy that we're moving forward with Mr. Drummond's recommendation to look at ways to consolidate the business support programs we deliver and to ensure we're getting the best value for the tax dollars we're investing. Can the minister please explain how Mr. Gord Nixon, from RBC, is qualified to lead the new Jobs and Prosperity Council and perhaps shed some light on the makeup of the rest of the council, ensuring that it reflects the interests of all Ontarians?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Many of you will know that Gord Nixon is the CEO of Royal Bank of Canada and the chairman of MaRS. But he's more than that. He's an Order of Canada and an Order of Ontario recipient. He once was chair of the Greater Toronto United Way campaign. He's a recipient of Canada's Outstanding CEO of the Year award and the business leader of the year award. He has received all kinds of CEO recognition globally as one of the best CEOs recognized around the world. He co-chairs the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council. I could go on, but let me say this: We're absolutely delighted that Mr. Nixon accepted Premier McGuinty's invitation to head up the Jobs and Prosperity Council.

As for the other members of the council, they'll be made up of a diverse and distinguished mix of Ontarians who will bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to this initiative.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Health. At 2:30 this past Wednesday afternoon, a call was placed to Ornge from the St. Francis Memorial Hospital in Barry's Bay, requesting an emergency air ambulance transfer to the Queensway Carleton Hospital. One hour later, Ornge dispatch advised that the air ambulance was not available because it was undergoing maintenance. The hospital made arrangements to transfer the patient by local land ambulance, but Ornge insisted that the patient was now theirs and must be transferred by Ornge land ambulance—more confusion, more delay. The land ambulance arrived and eventually so did the helicopter. Now in kidney failure, the patient was flown to the Ottawa general hospital, where she died on Friday morning.

Did Ornge make the minister aware of this tragic incident? If so, can she tell us why, yet once again, Ornge was unable to respond?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me first express my condolences to the family.

I can tell you that we take patient safety extremely seriously. The new leadership at Ornge, the new board, are—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There were people on this side asking for shushing and quiet when the question was being posed. I'm asking for shushing and quiet when it's being answered.

Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Patient safety is the highest priority of the new leadership at Ornge, and we do take every incident very seriously. Every incident is investigated, Speaker, and I can assure the member opposite that this incident will be investigated, as well. There is a process that the ministry goes through, that Ornge goes through and, if he so chooses, the coroner goes through to determine if there are any lessons that can be learned, and if so, we must implement them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Apparently the minister was not aware, and apparently Ornge isn't keeping her abreast of these incidents.

The inability to respond by Ornge is emerging as a systemic issue. Last week, the new Ornge CEO was quoted as saying that it's unrealistic to expect 24-hour emergency service, that it's just too expensive.

Is that the best that we can expect from the minister's new management team, from her new board of directors, from the new performance agreement and from the new legislation that the minister has tabled here? If patient safety cannot be her priority and if she cannot have Ornge reporting these incidents to her, then quite frankly we have a serious problem here.

I ask the minister to tell us again: Was she aware of this, and what—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I would caution the member opposite from jumping to any conclusions about any particular incidents. There are people who are highly qualified to do the research, to get the facts, to make determinations.

I can assure you that the people at Ornge, the front-line staff who every day come to work to save lives, are the most loyal, responsible and highly skilled individuals. We in Ontario should be enormously grateful for the people at Ornge.

The drive-by smears from the member opposite, I think, are not helpful. I would urge the member opposite, if he really wants to be part of the solution, to support Bill 50 and stop blocking passage of Bill 50.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture. Minister, the horse racing industry is an important part of the agriculture industry in rural Ontario. We keep hearing from the government that consultation with the horse racing industry will happen in due course, but breeders are making decisions that are three years away. Other parts of the industry, like feed, need time to plan their investments. Businesses cannot operate within this ambiguous "due course" time frame. They need firm commitments.

When exactly will the government make good on its promise to consult with the horse racing sector on a path forward for this important industry?

Mr. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, the OLG goes to the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Last evening, I had the opportunity to meet with representatives of the horse racing industry, as well—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Lanark, come to order.

1120

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I had the opportunity last evening to speak with representatives of OHRIA as well as the quarter horse racing industry. I sought their advice on how to move forward. I'll be meeting with them again. I'll have an announcement very shortly with respect to how we're going to transition this industry to a better future for horse racing in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: More ambiguity from the Minister of Agriculture on the effects that this decision has for rural Ontario as he passes the buck to the finance minister, who obviously has no plan for the industry going forward.

This was a revenue-sharing agreement, not a subsidy. It should have been worked on going forward and followed through so that that sector could continue.

We're hearing now that this decision is going to result in the slaughtering of thousands of horses in the province of Ontario. Why can't the minister give small business

owners a firm date on the promised consultation to transition that industry going forward?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: As I have indicated, I began those consultations last evening. In spite of the NDP's opposition to corporate handouts, they want us to continue to subsidize an industry that sends a lot of its money outside of the province.

The member opposite talks a good game when he's out in public, but when it came to negotiating at budget time, they didn't want to put the issue on the agenda.

We will help this industry transition. We've undertaken that. I began those discussions last evening. There's no ambiguity about that. I expect very shortly more announcements as we move to a stronger horse racing industry that is sustainable in the future and that will help sustain rural Ontario. I look forward to hearing more ideas from the members opposite—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

As a former medical officer of health, I know there is a direct link between student nutrition and academic success. Healthy foods allow students to grow not only physically but also socially, emotionally and intellectually while succeeding in the classroom. But providing meals and snacks to children does much more than help them succeed at school; it's also an important avenue for helping to combat poverty in the province.

To the minister: What is being done across Ontario to ensure that kids are getting the best possible start to their school day?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I would like to thank the member from Oak Ridges–Markham for the question. Last week, many of my colleagues know that the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Foundation for Student Success released the results of an important study on the role that nutrition plays in student success, and the results speak for themselves. Middle and secondary school students who eat breakfast at school on most days achieve better academic results. It sounds intuitive; the study has proven it. Those academic results improved right across the board. These same students are more likely to come to school and less likely to be suspended. Important studies like these emphasize just how crucial our student nutrition program is.

Since 2003, our government has quadrupled its investment to our student nutrition program, and I'm proud to say that last year, we provided nutritious breakfasts to over 660,000 elementary and secondary students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you to the minister for updating us on this important program in Toronto.

In York region, Food for Learning, operated by over 776 volunteers, serves 23,000 children. Last year, 83,808 volunteer hours were dedicated to planning, preparing

and serving over 450,000 breakfasts and 780,000 snacks. This program is invaluable for my constituents of Oak Ridges–Markham.

A strong, publicly funded education system which takes our children's nutritional health into consideration is key to reducing poverty. Minister, can you tell us what else is being done in Ontario to ensure that Ontario students get the best possible start?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Research has consistently shown how important it is for kids of all ages to get good nutrition. The urban and priority high school funding, as an example, through the Ministry of Education, gives help for secondary schools in urban neighbourhoods dealing with issues like poverty. Through this program, the Ministry of Education provides \$10 million to urban boards with at-risk students to, amongst other things, support nutrition.

Combining with that investment, our new school food and beverage policy has nutrition standards for food and beverages sold in schools, including cafeterias, vending machines and tuck shops.

We want all of our kids to eat healthy so that they will be successful in school, and we're building on the investments that we've made in a healthy schools strategy—daily physical activity for younger kids—to ensure that all of our students will be healthy and successful in every Ontario school.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Last week in their news release, Cliffs Natural Resources merely stated that they agreed to consider a feasibility study in Sudbury, not to build a facility. They also said the agreement could be derailed by certain conditions, which included “uncertainty in market conditions, results of future prospects, slowing of the economic growth rate in China, changes in currency values, availability of equipment, energy supply and weather conditions,” among others.

That adds up to a lot of uncertainty, and it's a far cry from the language you used in your announcement. In fact, it almost sounded like you were talking about two different projects. To listen to your rhetoric, one would think you were already shipping ore. How do you explain this discrepancy, Minister?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: We continue to celebrate the fact that Cliffs has every confidence in the province of Ontario, and that's why they announced that they're willing to make a \$3.3-billion investment in the province of Ontario that will create jobs not only in northern Ontario but across Ontario.

Speaker, this is incredibly good news that the company has moved from pre-feasibility to feasibility. We look forward to that process. We look forward to continuing to dialogue with Cliffs, with our First Nations communities, with the communities in Ontario. At the

end of the day, we see this Ring of Fire as an incredible opportunity for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Minister, Sonny Gagnon, chief of Aroland First Nation, said that the minister tried to “buy him off” late Tuesday night, mere hours before his announcement, after ignoring First Nations for months.

Nishnawbe Aski Nation says they were completely shut out of this decision.

Chief Peter Moonias of Neskantaga First Nation said, “They're going to have to cross that river and I told them if they want to cross that river, they're going to have to kill me first.”

So my question is, if the minister is working closely with First Nations, as he claims, why are so many groups so upset?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The fact of the matter is that there are ongoing discussions with all of the partners in this particular mining project.

Our First Nations communities suggested to us that regional infrastructure supports were very, very important and that should form part of the framework that we enter into. They suggested that social supports were very important and that they should be a part of the framework we've entered into. They suggested that regional environmental impacts were very, very important and they should be a part of the framework agreement that we've entered into. They suggested that resource benefit sharing was very, very important to them and it should be a part of the framework for discussion.

Speaker, we will continue to dialogue with our First Nations communities. We will continue to dialogue with industry. We will continue to dialogue with our environmental groups. We will continue to do that which is necessary in order to achieve the Ring of Fire's potential for all of Ontario.

ONTARIO SAVINGS BONDS

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is to the Minister of Finance. A constituent of mine from Port Colborne, Frank Olm, recently lost his spouse, Carol, who was a nurse, to cancer. While doing the paperwork for her estate, he learned that transferring her Ontario savings bonds to her spouse was going to incur a 3% fee of the total amount of the bonds.

Why is the Ontario savings bond program charging people a fee on a simple name transfer that's more than the interest earned on the bonds themselves?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Our condolences to the family. There are a number of fees related to estate transfers. I'm not familiar with this specific circumstance. I'll undertake to look into it for the member and report back to the House. I know these fees have been in place for many years, likely brought in by the previous government.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Speaker, we're not talking about rich people here in my riding. We're talking about families who, over the years—in this case, 40 years—built up some modest savings in Ontario savings bonds, and they did that to support the province of Ontario because they believe in the province of Ontario.

Frank, the constituent, was told that the fee would be waived after my office actually contacted the ministry, but that transfer has yet to be processed. So the question still remains: Will the minister commit to intervening and looking into this kind of bizarre and costly practice?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I think that's a very reasonable request. I certainly will undertake to look at not only the specifics of that but into the policy. I thank the member for raising it in the House today.

TOURISM

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: My question is for the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. As the sun starts to shine and with summer quickly approaching, Ontarians are starting to plan their summer vacations. They will plan their vacations with itineraries that include stops at renowned attractions and beautiful scenic landscapes, and I'm sure Windsor-Essex will be on that list. As visitors to destinations both inside and outside of the province, Ontarians will seek out some of Canada's and the world's most alluring cuisine, entertainment, recreation and cultural hot spots.

But in addition to what lies beyond Ontario's borders, there is much to see and do right here at home. What is the government doing to invest in bringing tourists to Ontario this summer to experience all that we have to offer in this great province?

Hon. Michael Chan: Thank you very much to the honourable member for asking the question. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that June 15 will be a sight to remember for Ontarians and guests to our province as we welcome Nik Wallenda, a world-renowned tightrope walker, who will cross the gorge at Niagara Falls. This signature event has already attracted interest from around the world and is estimated to draw 125,000 spectators and have an economic impact of more than \$20 million in Ontario.

Events such as these attract tourists, create jobs and support economic growth. Every year, they support over 20,000 jobs in Ontario and generate millions of dollars in revenue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you, Minister, for the answer. I'm pleased to see that this government is taking initiative to foster tourism throughout the province.

Ontario indeed hosts a variety of festivals and events, and showcases famous landmarks and outdoor sports activities that make it a destination of choice for outside visitors. I'm proud of the busy festival season we have in Windsor and across the province: Art in the Park, and Carousel of Nations, to name two that are quickly approaching in Windsor.

In order to continue to draw tourists to this wonderful province we are privileged to call home, our government must continue to reinvent the industry by promoting and supporting it, by ensuring we remain competitive to continue to support jobs and generating over \$22 billion in Ontario's economy. Speaker, can the minister indicate what else the government is doing to promote this sector?

Hon. Michael Chan: The member will be reassured to hear that since 2003, our government has invested over \$230 million to support more than 4,200 festivals and events across Ontario through a number of tourism and culture programs.

Over the next few years, the international spotlight will continue to shine on Ontario as we host the 2013 IIHF World Women's Championships in Ottawa, World Pride in 2014 in Toronto, and the 2015 Pan/Parapan American Games.

We are also expanding into new markets in Brazil, in India and in China. Our government has signed three agreements with Chinese provinces that are expected to have over \$200 million in benefits for Ontario's tourism economy.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the government House leader. Speaker, we now have a motion before the government House leader from the Legislature asking for broader terms of reference for the public accounts committee. We have a motion before the government House leader requesting that we sit throughout the break week. We have a motion before the government House leader asking to sit into the summer.

We have three hearing days left. We know that Dr. Mazza himself is refusing to come at this point. It looks as though if we don't get the extension, we may never hear from Dr. Mazza and other key witnesses whom we must hear from.

I would like to know from the government House leader: Will he commit today to give the public accounts committee the additional request to sit throughout the break and to sit throughout the summer so that we can, in fact, get to the bottom of this?

Hon. John Milloy: We will consider all requests that come forward, and the issue of Dr. Mazza, of course, is up to the committee. But I would like to congratulate the public accounts committee on the good work they do. They're going to be holding a number more hearings. In fact, a lot of information has come out, and it will be discussed by the committee. If the member wants to conduct hearings on the floor of the House, perhaps he'd like to know about a \$7,000 invoice from Kelly Mitchell, a top Tory insider, expense to prepare a strategy for engaging the PC Party. Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of it, and step 1 in the strategy is called, "Make Peace with Frank Klees." Let me quote: "It will be important"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Beaches–East York for a point of order.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes, on a point of order, I would like to advise the House that today is a very special day. The member from Welland is celebrating a birthday, and I know we all wish her the best.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. There are no deferred votes. This House stands adjourned until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): In the Speaker's gallery today, we have students and staff from St. John's College in Brantford, Assumption College in Brantford, and Holy Trinity college in Simcoe. We welcome our guests for being here to learn all about the Legislature.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DAVE STECKLE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize an outstanding citizen from the Goderich area: Dave Steckle. He was recently presented with the 2012 Man of Integrity Award. The Man of Integrity program was conceived by the Domestic Assault Review Team, known as DART, of Huron county.

DART members wanted to come up with an idea to help men become more aware and better educated to put an end to domestic violence. They decided to catch men doing positive things in their everyday lives promoting gender equality and reward them. This initiative is the first of its kind in Canada. This year, Dave Steckle, who owns and runs Huron Ridge Acres, a greenhouse and nursery, was recognized.

In the past year, Dave unselfishly took in a woman and her children to keep them safe from her husband for a two-week period. He kept their car out of sight in order to protect their whereabouts.

Dave has always upheld his employees with the greatest respect, and he has told them that if there are problems at home, that comes first, such as a sick child, for example. If there is one in their home, they should be there with their child, because there's always another day to go to work.

Over the years, Dave's home has been open to those who were going through a troublesome time. Dave always goes out of his way to make this a better world for everyone around him.

I want to thank Dave for his efforts in making Huron county a safer place for women.

CALYPSO WATER PARK
PARC AQUATIQUE CALYPSO

Mr. Grant Crack: It gives me great pleasure to take a moment to speak about the Calypso theme water park, which is located in Limoges, in my riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

On April 26 of this year, Calypso, Canada's biggest and best theme water park, was once again honoured during the Ottawa Tourism Awards, where it received the Innovation of the Year award for its spectacular aquatic complex, Summit Tower. At 10-storeys high, it's the highest free-standing waterslide tower in North America.

This is the second award Calypso has received in 2012. The water park was also recently awarded the prestigious title of Company of the Year by the Regroupement des gens d'affaires de la Capitale Nationale during its 2012 gala.

Calypso president and CEO, Guy Drouin, states: "Innovation is at the very heart of our business decisions, and both of these prestigious awards encourage us to set the bar higher moving forward. Furthermore, we are equally thrilled to see the tangible impact our efforts had on Ottawa's tourist industry."

I agree with Mr. Drouin.

Avec l'addition du nouveau complexe aquatique Summit Tower, le parc Calypso investit plus de 50 millions de dollars qui contribuent au développement commercial et économique de la région. Cet investissement procure 500 emplois et permet à des centaines de milliers de visiteurs de s'amuser davantage.

Parc Calypso has a positive impact on eastern Ontario and specifically in my riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. I congratulate them on their current successes. I look forward to working hard on their behalf as they embark on their existing future expansion plans, and I wish them well in their future endeavours.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

Mr. Robert Bailey: As the MPP for Sarnia–Lambton, as a father and as a grandfather, I'm deeply saddened by the string of youth suicides that have shocked my community in recent months. Last week, another young person from my community took her life. It is simply impossible for me to express in words the pain that these events have caused the families and friends and the larger community which surrounds these individuals. As one constituent wrote to me, "The time for quiet worry has long passed."

I again stand here, two years after I first called for a provincial comprehensive suicide prevention strategy and to urge this government to act. Last spring, this House called upon the government to table an action plan to implement the 23 recommendations found in the all-party Select Committee on Mental Health report entitled *Navigating the Journey to Wellness*. A year later, only two of these recommendations have been adopted.

Mr. Speaker, there's no shortage of studies and reports. It is time for this government to implement these recommendations, and also to move forward on Bill 14 to put an end to bullying in our schools.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: We know that four times as many LGBTQ students attempt suicide as heterosexual students. I stand here as a United Church minister, a member of the largest Protestant denomination in Canada, a denomination that has been ordaining openly gay and lesbian people since 1988 and has condoned same-sex marriage for at least 10 years.

We were also privy to hear from the Ontario English Catholic teachers of Ontario, who stood up, 90% of them, and supported their children in being able to form peer groups, support groups, including gay-straight alliances in Catholic schools. We know there is nothing homophobic about being Christian, and in fact being Christian compels us to stand with our vulnerable children, to stand up for them and to stand with them. It is their charter right of freedom of assembly. It is their charter right to structure groups and to call them what they will. We support our students' right to support gay-straight alliances. It's not only our duty as legislators in this place, but it is also our duty as people of faith—not just as Christians but as people of all faith. So I stand here in support of our vulnerable children—I ask all members to do so—and I stand here also as a committed Christian.

ROGER CONANT

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I rise today in the House to say happy birthday and congratulations to the Honourable Roger Conant on his 90th birthday.

Mr. Conant was born on May 26, 1922, in Oshawa, Ontario. He is the son of the Honourable Gordon Daniel Conant, who served as Premier of this province in 1942, having previously served as the mayor of Oshawa and the Attorney General of Ontario.

Mr. Conant graduated from the University of Toronto with a bachelor of arts degree. He enlisted and fought in World War II as a lieutenant as part of the Canloan program, where young officers in Canada were loaned to the British army. Unfortunately, the casualty rate was about 75%. Two days after D-Day, Roger Conant landed on the beaches of Normandy. He was badly injured; they actually thought he was dead. But then luckily he had survived when 24 hours later the British retook the field and found him alive. It took eight months for him to heal in England.

After World War II, he joined the forces again in the Korean War and attained the rank of major. He was awarded the Canadian Forces decoration for his service.

He was called to the bar, was a Queen's Counsel, and raised his family in Ajax. He has been a major mover and shaker in that community. Appointed to District Court of

Ontario in 1977, he served in Superior Court for 17 years.

But he didn't retire, Mr. Speaker. He didn't sit on his laurels. He went on to serve as a judge and panel member of the Pension Appeals Board of Canada. His two sons and three of his grandchildren are joining him today, and we all say: Happy birthday, Honourable Roger Conant.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Happy birthday. I'm allowed to do that.

PROPERTY RIGHTS

Mr. Randy Hillier: Earlier I tabled a motion, which reads as follows, in the House:

"That, in the opinion of this House, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms should be amended to enshrine property rights for Ontarians, as follows:

"(1) The following section is inserted after section 7:

"7.1(1) In Ontario, everyone has the right not to be deprived, by any act of the Legislative Assembly or by any action taken under authority of an act of the Legislative Assembly, of the title, use, or enjoyment of real property or of any right attached to real property, or of any improvement made to or upon real property, unless made whole by means of full, just and timely financial compensation," and that this section "refers to any act of the Legislative Assembly made before or after the coming into force of this section.

"(2) This amendment may be cited as the Constitution Amendment, 2012 (No Expropriation in Ontario without Compensation), and reference to the Constitution Acts, 1867 to 1982, shall be deemed to include a reference to the Constitution Amendment, 2012 (No Expropriation in Ontario without Compensation)."

1510

MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Last week, this government announced part of its backroom deal with Cliffs Natural Resources to the public.

While Cliffs made a business decision to process northwestern Ontario resources in northeastern Ontario, which is its right, this government has no excuse for failing in its duty to involve northerners in the process. While the government is silent on many details, it is clear that this government has made commitments without involving municipal leaders or First Nations.

Yesterday, Chief Peter Moonias of Neskantaga First Nation made his viewpoint pretty clear. He said he's willing to lay down his life to protect the lakes and rivers that will be jeopardized by a north-south corridor that this government seems to favour. Chief Moonias told me that not only was he not consulted, but he did not receive so much as a phone call from either the government of Ontario or Cliffs.

These are the northwest's resources, and this government has an obligation to ensure that we in the northwest benefit from them. This is our land, these are our re-

sources and they are ours to benefit from. We demand that this government stop making unilateral decisions and give northerners the respect we deserve. This government must start representing our needs and interests today; otherwise, its not just Cliffs that will receive an eviction notice from the northwest, it will be the government of Ontario.

AJAX BOMB GIRLS

Mr. Joe Dickson: Speaker, I would like to introduce the Ajax Bomb Girls legacy campaign. In the last of the Great Wars, from 1939 to 1945, there was one saying that proved true here in Ontario: Behind every good man there is a great woman.

Such was the case on 28,000 government-expropriated acres of land that was known as DIL, which is now the home of Ajax, Ontario. While our heroes were at war to protect our freedom, women made up over half of the 20,000 people who worked with explosive and hazardous materials, producing over 40 million shells, as DIL, now Ajax, became the largest shell-filling and munitions plant in the entire British Empire.

This morning we introduced four women who are leading a community initiative for the women of Defence Industries Ltd. They are chair and regional councillor Colleen Jordan; treasurer and long-time councillor Pat Brown; fundraiser and retired councillor Pat Clark; and honorary patron, 90-year-old Louise Johnson.

They came daily from across Canada on horse and wagon, on bicycles, on foot, in cars and on trains, including cattle cars, to work 10 years a day, six days a week.

This community is raising funds to erect a memorial on the planned civic square, and contributions are being taken at every town of Ajax municipal facility. The premier fundraising event will be a shell-abrasion tribute at Deer Creek on Friday, September 28.

We honoured our fighting men and women, and now we honour our women known as the Bomb Girls just two days after Mother's Day. God bless them all.

VISIT OF POLISH PRIME MINISTER

Mr. John Yakabuski: History was made this past Sunday, when Polish Prime Minister His Excellency Donald Tusk visited Wilno, some 154 years after the first Polish Kashubs made Canada their new home.

Wilno became the first Polish settlement in Canada, so it was most appropriate that Prime Minister Tusk made it a major part of his state visit to Canada.

Prime Minister Tusk made good on a promise to do so a few years ago. His planned visit in 2010 was cancelled when the plane carrying Polish President Lech Kaczynski, his wife and almost 100 top government and military officials crashed, killing all aboard just days before the trip was to take place.

Tusk arrived by helicopter and toured the Polish Kashub Heritage Park and Museum. He then visited St.

Stanislaus Pioneer Cemetery, where the early settlers are buried. He commented that he felt as if they were visiting the graves of our dearest relatives. He is a Kashub Pole himself.

A reception at St. Mary Catholic Church followed, where invitees had an opportunity to meet Prime Minister Tusk and other dignitaries. Guests were treated to a delicious traditional Polish meal.

When my ancestors first laid eyes on the land and the hills of Wilno, they would have been impressed by its beauty. They would have also been equally dismayed by its unsuitability for farming. There was, however, no turning back. As Peter Glofcheskie, president of the Wilno Heritage Society, said, they had to work extremely hard just to survive. What pulled them through was their faith that God would provide and his will would be done. That faith still exists today.

To all those who worked so hard to make this day possible, I say thank you. Your efforts are greatly appreciated. As a Canadian of Polish Kashub heritage, I was proud to be part of it.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated May 15, 2012, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HELPING ONTARIANS ENTER THE SKILLED TRADES ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 VISANT À FACILITER L'ACCÈS AUX MÉTIERS SPÉCIALISÉS EN ONTARIO

Mr. Dunlop moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 91, An Act to amend the Trades Qualification and Apprenticeship Act / Projet de loi 91, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la qualification professionnelle et l'apprentissage des gens de métier.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: The bill will be called the Helping Ontarians Enter the Skilled Trades Act, 2012.

The bill amends the Trades Qualification and Apprenticeship Act to specify that no more than one person may be apprenticed to each journeyman of an employer in a trade and to remove the power to make regulations respecting the ratio of apprentices to journeymen who may be employed by an employer in a trade.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to also say that we've got some folks here today in the members' gallery, if I could have a moment to introduce them: Gord Sproule from Merit Corp.; Stephen Sell, the Ontario Electrical League; Stewart Kiff; and, from the Pre-Apprenticeship Training Institute, Rui Cuhn, director of operations; Evan Holt; and two pre-apprenticeship young people, Michael Eccleston and Frank D'Assisi. I just wanted to give them a warm welcome. Thanks very much. It's good to have you here.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

POLICE WEEK

SEMAINE DE LA POLICE

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: May 13 to 19 is Police Week in Ontario. It is my great pleasure and privilege to rise in this House today to express, on behalf of our government and the people of Ontario, our gratitude to the brave police officers who serve us and help keep our communities safe.

La Semaine de la police est observée au mois de mai de chaque année, en conjonction avec la Journée commémorative des agents de la paix, célébrée dans le monde entier le 15 mai.

Ontario's annual ceremony of remembrance, which is held on the first Sunday in May each year, is an opportunity for all Ontarians to pay tribute to fallen officers.

We know that police officers face extreme risks to protect us. Sadly, sometimes those risks call upon our officers to pay the ultimate sacrifice. That was the case of the late Constable Garrett Styles of York Regional Police, who was killed last year and whose memory we honoured during this Sunday's annual ceremony of remembrance.

We mourn the loss of the brave officers who died in the line of duty. We thank and honour them for their service and grieve with their family, friends and colleagues over their passing. We will forever treasure their memory.

Les collectivités de l'Ontario sont sûres grâce au travail de milliers d'hommes et de femmes qui servent comme agents de police. La sécurité de l'Ontario repose sur le dévouement des agents de police, qui incarnent ce qu'il y a de meilleur en nous. Ils partagent notre souhait et notre espoir de vivre dans des collectivités sécuritaires et dynamiques.

1520

Police Week helps to strengthen the link between the police and our communities by reminding us that we must all work together. Mr. Speaker, police officers are key members of our community. They are our neighbours and our friends.

This year's theme for Police Week, Leading the Way to a Safer Tomorrow, is all about that joint effort. It points to the need for a partnership between police and the community. It reminds us, as citizens, of the role we have to play in creating a successful partnership. The job of making our community safe is not just for the police. It involves all of us.

As we celebrate Police Week, we also acknowledge the thousands of men and women across the province whose community work helps prevent crime and helps make our communities safer.

Je tiens à remercier l'Association des chefs de police de l'Ontario de sa collaboration à l'élaboration du thème de la Semaine de la police, ainsi que tous les services de police pour les activités qu'ils ont organisées en l'honneur de la Semaine de la police dans toute la province.

Pendant cette semaine, les services de police démontreront le succès des partenariats qu'ils ont établis au sein des collectivités et inviteront le public à participer aux activités organisées.

I urge all members of this House to participate wherever they can and stand with local police officers and community organizations in working together to enhance community safety.

Thank you again to all the men and women of the police, who protect us and whose example inspires the spirit of community service in all of us. Merci.

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION MONTH

MOIS DE LA PRÉVENTION DE L'AGRESSION SEXUELLE

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I stand today to recognize May as Sexual Assault Prevention Month in Ontario. Every day in Canada, women of every age and background are victims of sexual violence.

Une femme sur trois dans ce pays sera victime de violence sexuelle durant sa vie.

One in three women in this country will experience sexual violence in their lifetime, Mr. Speaker—one in three. Just think about that shocking statistic. Think of three women in your life. Now absorb that number. Pretty startling, isn't it?

In 82% of cases, women are violated by someone they know, and very often someone they trust. As a society, as parents, as siblings, as friends, we need to provide young women with the knowledge to recognize and protect themselves from the danger of sexual assault.

Nous devons affirmer que la violence sexuelle sous toutes ses formes est inacceptable et qu'elle ne sera pas tolérée en Ontario.

We need to affirm that sexual violence in any form is not acceptable and will not be tolerated in Ontario. Sexual Assault Prevention Month is a time to do this. It's also a time to thank the dedicated women and men in every community who are working to end sexual violence.

Sexual Assault Prevention Month is a time to recommit our support to victims of this intolerable crime. And it is a time for each of us to ask what it means to prevent and react to sexual violence if we ever experience it as a bystander.

Just over a year ago, our government brought forward Changing Attitudes, Changing Lives, Ontario's first sexual violence action plan.

Le plan a été conçu à l'issue de consultations dans des collectivités de toute la province, avec plus de 350 survivantes, fournisseurs de services et spécialistes des secteurs de la santé, de l'éducation et de la justice.

The plan was developed after consultation in communities across the province with more than 350 survivors, service providers and experts in the health, education and justice sectors. At that time, Jacqueline Benn-John, president of the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres, said, "We are pleased that survivors' voices were included in the consultation process into the development of Ontario's sexual violence action plan. Their perspective is key to understanding the issue of sexual violence in an effort to make the lives of women safer in the future."

La voix et l'expérience des survivantes sont centrales à ce plan, et nous continuerons d'accorder la priorité à leurs conseils.

The voices and experiences of survivors were front and centre to this plan, and we'll continue to make their advice our priority.

Since the plan's launch last March, we have provided increased funding to Ontario's sexual assault centres to help them respond better to women in their communities. We have trained more than 100 crown attorneys, sexual assault workers, nurses and police officers to help them better understand the impact of sexual violence on victims. We convened an international forum, which brought together experts on aging and sexual violence to discuss the impact of sexual violence on older women. We've supported the development of standards of care for hospital emergency rooms and hospital-based sexual assault and domestic violence treatment centres to better support victims. We've set up a French-language services working group to improve programs and supports to address the unique needs of francophone women who have experienced violence. We've funded aboriginal organizations to address the needs of women experiencing sexual violence in aboriginal communities. We've established a human trafficking advisory committee and invested in initiatives to improve supports to victims of human trafficking. And we've supported the develop-

ment of sexual violence prevention public education materials.

Later this month, I will announce another important initiative that will better support victims of sexual violence whose first language is not English or French.

As we continue to move forward with our sexual violence action plan, I am confident that we are on the right path. Community by community, together with our partners, we will begin to erase sexual violence from our province's future.

There is more to be done to protect women from sexual violence. We all share a responsibility to stop this unacceptable crime.

En oeuvrant de concert au sein du gouvernement et avec nos partenaires communautaires, les survivantes, la police et même les spectateurs, nous parviendrons à mettre un terme à la violence sexuelle.

By working together across government with community partners, survivors, police and bystanders, we will put an end to sexual violence.

PUBLIC WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Public works and infrastructure, as a matter of our government policy, play a significant role in economic development, job creation and our quality of life. That is true for our investments in colleges and universities, hospitals, schools, transit, roads, highways, sewers and clean water systems. We are proud of our record of investments over the last eight years.

Under the previous government, their total infrastructure investment averaged \$2.6 billion over their last three years. Over our last eight years, our government has invested more than \$10 billion per year, creating more than 100,000 jobs per year.

Our 10-year infrastructure plan in both last year's and this year's budgets includes a \$35-billion, three-year-running public infrastructure commitment.

Public works and infrastructure are the foundation that have built Ontario. That is why today, on behalf of the McGuinty government, I am pleased to declare next week, May 20 to May 26, National Public Works Week in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to thank the thousands of dedicated people who work in this sector. And I would like to acknowledge, in the legislative chamber today, representatives from the Ontario Public Works Association, including: Sam Sidawi, senior engineer, city of Burlington; Carl Bodimeade, chair of the Ontario Coalition for Sustainable Infrastructure and senior vice-president at Hatch Mott MacDonald; and Gary Moore, director of engineering services, city of Hamilton.

Mr. Speaker, we acknowledge and respect the reality that the public works industry and all of its sectors are crucial to moving our province forward, creating jobs and keeping our economy competitive. Since 2003, our public works partners have helped our government

deliver more than \$75 billion in infrastructure investments.

Here are some highlights. In public transit alone, more than \$13.4 billion has already been invested across Ontario, including \$6 billion in GO Transit. We have committed an additional \$8.4 billion to support the construction of the Eglinton crosstown LRT, the Sheppard LRT, the Finch LRT and the Scarborough RT in Toronto; a \$600-million commitment to the Ottawa LRT project; and \$300 million to support the Kitchener-Waterloo LRT.

1530

In terms of other investments, this year's infrastructure budget includes \$618 million to support highways and bridges in the north. We are extending the 407 east toward Peterborough, and new 401 interchanges for London are soon to be realized. In fact, our 2012-13 infrastructure budget dedicates \$12.9 billion to infrastructure, of which 47% is for building highways and transit. We have also made record investments in electricity-generating and grid-capacity infrastructure.

And together, we've transformed project delivery. Our provincial agency, Infrastructure Ontario, is a global leader in innovative procurement, financing and project management. IO has completed or procured more than 50 projects worth more than \$21 billion, virtually all within budget with savings of billions of dollars.

We have completed 22 hospitals, and more than 30 new or expanded hospitals are now in procurement or under construction, including hospitals in Cambridge, Burlington, Brockville and Barrie. Other projects include courthouses, sports facilities, roads and transit in the procurement or construction stage. For example, the Windsor-Essex Parkway, truly an economic development initiative through one of North America's leading trade corridors, is under construction and is tracking on time and under budget.

Every step of the way, we depend upon the skills and knowledge of those employed in public works, acknowledged to be among the best worldwide. On behalf of all Ontarians, we salute and thank them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Responses?

POLICE WEEK

Mr. John Yakabuski: I welcome the opportunity to thank our police services and all the police officers in the province of Ontario, who put their lives on the line each and every day to ensure that we live in a safe and secure province. After all, it is their presence that stands between us and chaos. Whether it's on our streets, in our communities or on our waterways, they are out there risking their lives in order to protect ours.

Police Week is a great time for communities to show their appreciation and acknowledge the tireless efforts of these brave men and women. I would encourage my colleagues and all the citizens of Ontario to participate this week in the events in their own communities, hosted by their local police service boards. Just as police help

protect our communities, showing your support at the local events celebrating Police Week provides a strong vote of confidence and show of appreciation.

On behalf of our leader, Tim Hudak, and the Progressive Conservative caucus, we support the fantastic job our police officers do in this province. They put their lives on the line every day so that we can live in harmony, peace and safety here in the province of Ontario. We look forward to continuing to work with and support Ontario's finest officers.

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION MONTH

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise today to mark Sexual Assault Prevention Month. Sexual assault is a tragedy within our society, and we cannot ignore it.

Many community-based groups exist for the sole purpose of helping victims and their families. I want to take this opportunity to mention and commend the work of some of the organizations that work tirelessly to help women and children who experience abuse.

In my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, I'm proud of the work done by many agencies like the Kawartha Sexual Assault Centre, the YWCA in Haliburton and Peterborough, and the Peterborough Regional Health Centre Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Response Team. They provide immediate and confidential services for victims and survivors of abuse. These organizations provide a 24-hour crisis line, but also offer counselling, outreach services, public education, temporary housing and volunteer opportunities.

In the riding of Dufferin-Caledon, the Family Transition Place has spearheaded educational programs alongside its safe shelter, counselling and transitional services for abused women and their children. Its programs have been successful in creating a safe learning environment for students by boosting their self-esteem, teaching them about respect and encouraging children to reach out for help when an issue arises. This program has been so successful that they hope to take it across the province.

I want to use the opportunity of Sexual Assault Prevention Month to thank all the organizations for their outstanding work. To everyone who works on behalf of eliminating sexual assault in the province of Ontario, thank you.

PUBLIC WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Frank Klees: I join with Minister Chiarelli today in acknowledging the work of the Ontario Public Works Association and also to extend a welcome to the representatives who are here with us today, as introduced by the minister.

The OPWA and its very capable board are blessed with members from both the public and the private sectors, who share and combine their expertise in public

works to advance the opportunities and solutions in this important sector.

Our public works are very important to all of us, not just because of the economic benefits we derive from them, but for the quality of life that they create for Ontario families. Hospitals, schools, community centres, roads, transit and water systems are all there for us to use and benefit from, and we use them every day. Each of them requires public works professionals to plan them, to build them and to maintain them. That is the work of the people involved in public works. It is a major responsibility, and we benefit every day from the work that they do.

I also want to talk about the opportunities. We have many needs related to our public works infrastructure these days, and finding the resources to meet those needs is indeed a challenge. More than ever, we need public works professionals to come forward, offer ideas, collaborate and help ensure that those facilities, those hospitals and bridges, the schools, are built and maintained for the people of Ontario and indeed across the country.

The theme, Creating a Lasting Impression, is very appropriate, because what we do today with respect to our public works will leave a lasting legacy. By working together, we can find those solutions to the challenges we face.

Congratulations to all our public works professionals. Thank you for the work you do each and every day to make our province a better place.

POLICE WEEK

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to both the Police Week statement as well as the public works week.

The work police officers do to protect our communities and municipalities across Ontario deserves respect. We hear from different police services that there is a need for more officers to perform more core duties. OPP officers have talked about communities that cannot afford to pay for policing costs, where the police officer might be a half an hour away. Given a situation where a house is being broken into, or a domestic violence situation, do we really want our police officers to wait for a half an hour until reinforcements come? The answer is no. We would like them to act, but acting when you're under-resourced presents several personal risks, and that's what we're asking police officers to do: to put their lives on the line even more because our communities are under-resourced.

Salaries for police officers have also been an issue lately. We in the NDP believe that the nature of the job requires that there be adequate and fair compensation, and compensation that they negotiate fairly. Police officers are being called to perform more and more duties, and their compensation should reflect their expertise, skills and the hazardous nature of their jobs, and I commend certainly the service that they provide for our communities each and every day.

PUBLIC WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Also, Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to speak on the public works week. Indeed, being a construction worker myself, knowing the vital nature and importance that our infrastructure plays in our communities—the bridges, roads, sewers, tunnels, hospitals and schools—I commend the minister for highlighting the need to continue to invest in these vital services and to ensure that they are valued, not only as an economic portion of a strategic, economic puzzle, but also the work that they create for workers in our communities: good-paying, tangible jobs that are on the ground, that support families, support communities and, ultimately, support us all in this province.

So I'm pleased to end my statement here, but I congratulate the minister on continued investment in infrastructure in Ontario.

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION MONTH

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm responding to the sexual violence prevention month and the statement by the minister on such.

I want to acknowledge two phenomenal organizations. One is the White Ribbon Campaign, started in part by our own Jack Layton, the New Democrat, that focuses on men's role in this and calls upon all the men who are part of that campaign to take an oath: (1) that they will never be perpetrators of violence against women; and (2) that they'll never be silent in the face of it.

Also, there's another group that was started right here in the Legislature, an all-party group called Ruth's Daughters, which calls upon all leaders of faith groups and all women in faith groups to take an active role against sexual assault and domestic violence, primarily with women as a target. They're now currently planning a conference to be held next spring, but also services in the respective faith organizations to commemorate the victims.

1540

I want to also make a plea for one such organization: Victim Services Toronto. This is the only agency in Toronto that goes out; when the police get a call about sexual assault or domestic violence, they go with the police. They have not had a funding increase from this government for 20 years. In fact, the funding per victim for Victim Services Toronto has gone from \$286 per victim in 1990 to \$31 in 2010.

This is a plea from the New Democrats. If this is the way that this government responds to the victims of sexual assault, this is not a commendation. This is an organization, the only one in all of Toronto that does this vital work, and yet this is how we fund them and this is how we fund their victims.

I would really plead with the government—I have been doing this ever since I was elected six years ago—

please, go and meet with victim services. They're a phenomenal organization, just around the corner, down on College Street, housed by the police. That's the only free rent they could get. See the good work they do, and finally, finally fund them appropriately. This is not the way to treat women who are victims, and this is not the way to treat those who treat the women who are victims.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their comments.

PETITIONS

WATER QUALITY

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to be close to the top, if you will, in petitions. The one I'm presenting today reads as follows:

"Whereas under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, Ontario regulation 319/08, public health inspectors are required to undertake risk assessments of small drinking water systems;

"Whereas many of these small drinking water systems are located in homes operating bed and breakfasts in rural Ontario;

"Whereas private homes that are the sites of bed and breakfasts already have potable drinking water used by the homeowners and their families every day;

"Whereas many of these bed and breakfasts have established the quality of their drinking water through years of regular testing;

"Whereas these home-based businesses are facing high costs to comply with the new requirements of regulation 319/08;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health amend Ontario regulation 319/08 to give the testing track record of a small drinking water system greater weight in the risk assessment process;

"Furthermore we, the undersigned, ask that bed and breakfasts operated within a private home with a drinking water supply meeting all the requirements of a private home not be subject to regulation 319/08."

I'm pleased to sign and support this and present it to Vincent, one of the pages.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to have a petition from Scarborough-Agincourt addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which states:

"Whereas recovering from injuries or illnesses at home can enhance recovery, reduce the strain on our health care system and provide comfort to patients;

"Whereas family caregivers need to focus on what matters most—providing care and support to their loved one—without the fear of losing their job;

"Whereas Ontarians who need to care for seriously ill or injured loved ones need job protection;

"Whereas the Family Caregiver Leave Act, if passed, would build on existing family medical leave to provide up to eight weeks of unpaid job leave for employees to provide care and support to a sick or injured family member;

"Whereas the PCs have pledged to vote against the bill, and permanently kill the legislation;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That all parties recognize the importance of health, family, and job security by supporting the Family Caregiver Leave Act to protect the jobs of working Ontarians who need to care for seriously ill or injured loved ones."

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature and send it with page Noah.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

Mr. Robert Bailey: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas approximately 3,500 suicides occur each year and suicide remains the second leading cause of death for 10- to 24-year-olds in Canada;

"Whereas Ontario remains the only province or territory in Canada without a comprehensive suicide prevention strategy;

"Whereas the Legislative Assembly of Ontario called on the government to table an action plan to implement the 23 recommendations found in the all-party Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions report, entitled *Navigating the Journey to Wellness*, in March 2011, however today only two recommendations have been implemented;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the Minister of Health immediately implements the remaining recommendations of the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions and create an umbrella agency, similar in scope to Cancer Care Ontario, to spearhead a provincial strategy that would ensure that a basket of core institutional, residential and community services are available to every region of the province for clients of all ages; therefore it would also ensure that there is equitable access to mental health services which are essential to suicide prevention and positive mental health in our communities."

I agree with this petition and will affix my name to the same.

TAXATION

Ms. Cindy Forster: I have a petition here.

"Whereas the Ontario budget tabled on March 26 continues to give billions of dollars to already profitable corporations through corporate tax cuts implemented in 2004 and 2009; and

"Whereas the Ontario budget freezes social assistance, ignores the child care crisis, dramatically underfunds health care and education, and threatens thousands of jobs in communities across Ontario, in both the public and private sectors; and

"Whereas all Ontarians are being asked to pay for corporate handouts;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to restore the corporate tax rate to at least 14% and add additional tax brackets for those receiving \$250,000 or more in income and redirect this funding to:

"—increase social assistance for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program recipients to restore lost purchasing power;

"—address the child care crisis for children under four years of age;

"—increase funding for health care, education, and other social programs; and

"—reverse public staffing cuts to ensure Ontarians receive high-quality services; and finally

"We petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to introduce labour law reform that will improve workers' ability to exercise their right to improve their working conditions through free collective bargaining."

I support this petition and affix my signature and will send it with page Noah.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for York South–Weston.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: She wasn't even standing. Go ahead.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I don't know why your microphone is on, but I hope it gets turned off.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Now, now.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I have a petition that reads as follows:

"Whereas St. John the Evangelist Catholic elementary school in Weston is overcrowded, with 480 students in a school designed for 260; and

"Whereas the students will be relocating 40 minutes away in September 2012 during the duration of the Metrolinx Weston tunnel construction; and

"Whereas the Toronto Catholic District School Board has placed St. John the Evangelist third on the urgent capital priority list for 2012;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We respectfully request full funding to replace St. John the Evangelist school during the Metrolinx Weston tunnel construction; therefore, the students are not relocated twice."

I agree with this petition, I will sign it and send it over with page Sarah.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and I'd like to thank residents of my riding and also Rideau Carleton Raceway for providing it to me.

"Whereas the Ontario horse racing and breeding industry generates \$2 billion of economic activity, mostly in rural Ontario;

"Whereas more than 60,000 Ontarians are employed by Ontario's horse racing and breeding industry;

"Whereas 20% of the funds generated by the OLG slots-at-racetracks program is reinvested in racetracks and the horse racing and breeding industry, while 75% is returned to the government of Ontario;

"Whereas the OLG slots-at-racetracks program generates \$1.3 billion a year for health care and other spending, making it the most profitable form of gaming in the province for OLG;

"Whereas the government has announced plans to cancel the slots-at-racetracks program, a decision that will cost the government \$1.1 billion per year and threatens more than 60,000 jobs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Call on the government of Ontario to protect the \$1.1 billion of revenue the government received annually because of the OLG slots-at-racetracks program; and direct OLG to honour the contracts with racetracks and protect the horse racing and breeding industry by continuing the OLG slots-at-racetracks revenue-sharing program."

I agree with the petition, will affix my signature and send it to the table with page Dia.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Toby Barrett: I wish to continue to read in petitions from Dunnville to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas, as an anti-bullying measure, Bill 13 is unnecessary because Ontarians already have Bill 157; and

"Whereas Bill 13 promotes radical revisions to school instruction on sex and gender that a majority of parents do not support; and

1550

"Whereas legislation is not the way to implement equity education (this should rather be addressed by teacher training, after wider parental consultation, in a way which respects the views of people of faith);

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to vote against Bill 13."

I agree with this and will affix my signature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I believe it's Timiskaming–Cochrane, as he was hiding behind the member from Haldimand–Norfolk, unfortunately. The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission provides services which are vital to the north's economy; and

"Whereas it is a lifeline for the residents of northern communities who have no other source of public transportation; and

"Whereas the ONTC could be a vital link to the Ring of Fire;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the planned cancellation of the Northlander and the sale of the rest of the assets of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission be halted immediately."

I fully agree, add my signature and give it page Shaumik.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Anyone else? The member from York-South Weston.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have another petition from the residents of York-South Weston that reads as follows:

"Whereas St. John the Evangelist Catholic elementary school in Weston is overcrowded, with 480 students in a school designed for 260; and

"Whereas the students will be relocating 40 minutes away in September 2012 during the duration of the Metrolinx Weston tunnel construction; and

"Whereas the Toronto Catholic District School Board has placed St. John the Evangelist third on the urgent capital priority list for 2012;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Respectfully request full funding to replace St. John the Evangelist school during the Metrolinx Weston tunnel construction; therefore, the students are not relocated twice."

I agree with this petition and sign and send it over with—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Okay, the member from Dufferin-Caledon.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, thank you. I am proud to enter the following petition into the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas a report from Ontario's Auditor General on the province's air ambulance service, Ornge, found a web of questionable financial deals where tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars have been wasted and public safety compromised;

"Whereas Ornge officials created a 'mini-conglomerate' of private entities that enriched former senior officers and left taxpayers on the hook for \$300 million in debt;

"Whereas government funding for Ornge climbed 20% to \$700 million, while the number of patients it airlifted actually declined;

"Whereas a subsidiary of Ornge bought the head office building in Mississauga for just over \$15 million and then leased it back to Ornge at a rate 40% higher than fair market rent;

"Whereas the Liberal Minister of Health completely failed in her duty to provide proper oversight of Ornge;

"Whereas this latest scandal follows the eHealth boondoggle where \$2 billion in health dollars have been wasted;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government of Ontario immediately appoint a special all-party select committee to investigate the scandals surrounding Ornge."

I support this petition, am pleased to affix my name to it and give it to page Sarah to take to the table.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Here's a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas currently the law takes the onus off of owners that raise violent dogs by making it appear that violence is a matter of genetics; and

"Whereas the Dog Owners' Liability Act does not clearly define a pit bull, nor is it enforced equally across the province, as pit bulls are not an acknowledged breed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly passes Bill 16, Public Safety Related to Dogs Statute Law Amendment Act, 2011, into law."

I agree with the thousands who have signed already, I affix my name and I give it to wonderful William to be delivered to the table.

AGGREGATE EXTRACTION

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Highland Companies, an American company, wants to build a quarry in Melancthon township which is to be bigger than Niagara Falls. It will be the second-largest in North America. It will be built over 200 feet (60 metres) below the water table of the headwaters that feed three major rivers. This will contaminate these rivers, which are a freshwater source for over one million people. Furthermore, the land that the quarry will be built on is some of the best farmland in Ontario. Over 50% of the GTA's potatoes are grown on this soil. The Highland Companies is under no obligation to fill in the quarry when they are finished. There is also

no law stating that there must be an environmental assessment on the quarry site before it is built. This quarry will hurt the environment and affect many people, and therefore it must be stopped.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To stop the development of the Melancthon quarry."

I'm happy to sign the petition.

TOURISM

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I have a petition here that's signed by over 1,000 people. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas tourism is a vital contributor to the economy of northwestern Ontario, bringing hundreds of millions of dollars into the province's economy from other provinces and the United States, unlike other regions in the province whose target demographic is people who already reside in Ontario;

"Whereas northwestern Ontario's tourist economy has been under attack by government policies such as the cancellation of the spring bear hunt, the harmonized sales tax (HST), the strong Canadian dollar and difficulties passing through the Canada/United States border; and

"Whereas studies have shown that tourism in the northwest nets significantly more money per stay than other regions of the province, in part due to visitors frequenting historical sites, parks and roadside attractions that they learn about through travel information centres;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To keep the travel information centres in Fort Frances, Kenora and Rainy River open permanently to ensure that northwestern Ontario maximizes the benefit of our tourist economy."

I support this and will give this to page Dia to deliver.

PROTECTION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas supported-living residents in southwestern and eastern Ontario were subjected to picketing outside their homes during labour strikes in 2007 and 2009; and

"Whereas residents and neighbours had to endure megaphones, picket lines, portable bathrooms and shining lights at all hours of the day and night on their streets; and

"Whereas individuals with intellectual disabilities and the organizations who support them fought for years to break down barriers and live in inclusive communities; and

"Whereas Bill 23 passed second reading in the Ontario Legislature on December 6, 2011;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the members of the Legislative Assembly vote in support of Sylvia Jones's Bill 23—the Protecting Vulnerable People Against Picketing Act."

I obviously support this petition. I'm pleased to affix my name to it and give it to page Jenny to take to the table.

OPPOSITION DAY

GASOLINE PRICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon the McGuinty government to task the Ontario Energy Board with establishing a weekly ceiling on gas prices in order to reduce price volatility, regional price differences and tackle price gouging and other anti-consumer industry practices. Addressed to the Premier.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think it's really clear—I think to everybody in this chamber, regardless of which riding you have the honour of representing—that in many parts of Ontario, people simply don't have a choice when it comes to the mode of transportation that they rely upon to go about their everyday lives: to pick up their kids, for example; take their kids to school; take them to sports activities; to get to work; to get to appointments; to take aging parents to appointments with doctors and specialists. It's really, really clear that in a lot of places in this province, the only option that people have is to use the private automobile. I think that's something that we need to acknowledge, and it's something we need to address, because we know that that use of that private automobile—in fact, really, when you think about it, transportation costs overall. Whether you're using a private automobile or public transportation systems, the cost of transportation overall is a large part of the family's budget. In fact, it's the second-largest purchase that people have in their budgets after their lodgings. Low- and modest-income families, in fact, devote much of the monthly income that they receive to transportation needs.

1600

I think it's also really clear, if you look at a family budget and see that transportation eats up a big piece of that budget—it only makes sense, Speaker, that a household needs to know its costs in order to budget appropriately because it gives you some confidence in what you're able to spend after you've allocated a certain amount to your transportation costs: your lodging, your transportation costs and then everything else comes after.

The thing that we see very clearly as a gap here in Ontario is the fact that the fluctuation in gas prices creates havoc with people's family budgets, with the monthly household budgets that families try to manage, and try to manage with some difficulty, particularly in tough economic times. What we need to see is families being able to have some reliability in terms of what those

transportation costs are going to be. The only way we're going to be able to provide that kind of certainty for families to be able to effectively budget is if we create a way that gas prices can be more predictable, and that's what this motion is all about: putting a ceiling on gas price so that, each and every week, a family will know what kind of expenditure they're going to expect for that week, so that they don't wake up one day and pay a certain amount for gas and then, three days later, they're paying 10 cents more for gas, and then after that, maybe two cents more, and then maybe a couple of days later, three cents less. It is a market that fluctuates significantly. All we're saying is, we think it is important to give some stability to those prices so that families can plan around it. It's about giving consumers predictable gas prices.

It's not to undermine global markets. We all know where the prices for gas are set. We know that they're set at the Mercantile Exchange in New York City. But we also know, Speaker, that we have gas stations that are gouging people at certain times. In fact, if I'm not mistaken, we're coming up to a holiday weekend in Ontario, and I really wouldn't be surprised, and I'm sure nobody in this chamber will be surprised, if we get to Thursday night and see that all of a sudden, Friday morning, gas prices are up about four, five, six, or maybe seven or eight cents. That's one problem. It's opportunistic gouging that happens regularly in this province. I would suggest that pretty much everybody who operates a motor vehicle in this chamber has experienced that very situation. It's unacceptable, it's unnecessary and we can get a handle on it, because it is opportunistic, Speaker. It is gouging that's being done just because they can get away with it, and it's unacceptable because it's the people of this province who have to change their vacation plans, or perhaps change their weekend plans, if they can't afford to fill up the gas tank.

It's interesting, because we also see some wild fluctuations within the province in terms of the pricing of gas overall. So yes, there's no doubt that, based on the region in which you live, added transportation costs need to be calculated into what the cost of gas would be generally.

It's interesting, because I used to think that this was something that was specific to northern Ontario but have found since, after telling this story to others, that in fact it happens all over Ontario. My brother lives in Woodstock, and he has related the same kind of story to me as I've seen for myself and experienced in the north, and I'll tell you what that story is. You're driving along. You're in a particular town and the gas is, let's say, \$1.45. That's about where it is right now: about \$1.45. Yes, that's not a misspeak; it's about \$1.45 in northern Ontario. You're in a particular community and you decide, "I've got a quarter of a tank left. Maybe I'll go to the next town and maybe it will be a little cheaper." But guess what? You get to the next town and it's \$1.53 or it's \$1.49 or, if you're really, really lucky—though, usually you're unlucky, so really what happened is, you filled up at

\$1.45. You didn't go to the next town, and guess what? It was a buck forty at the next town.

These wild fluctuations within regional areas are unacceptable. It's not necessary. Again, it's a way that gas stations are able to gouge the captive audience, to gouge the captive community, because they figure, "What the heck. The people that live in and around that town likely aren't going to be going very far, perhaps, so we'll just price at whatever we think they're able to bear, because we don't think they're going to go to the next town over to fill up the gas tank." Speaker, it's unacceptable, and it's something that really takes advantage of people in those communities. It's quite frustrating for folks. I think they see that there's a problem, when it comes to gas pricing in this province, and they look to their government to try to do something about it.

That's why New Democrats identified this as a place where we can help with the affordability of everyday life. People in Ontario know that we understand—that New Democrats understand—very clearly how tough times have been. Liberals haven't really understood that so very much. They put the HST on people at a time when they were being hit very, very hard in the recession. They didn't think an HST was going to create any hardship for families. Well, they were wrong, and of course, it did create hardship.

Likewise, we have this gas pricing system that causes hardship for families unnecessarily, when we can actually do something about it.

What we're saying is: You decided to put the HST on. We think you should be doing other things. We think there are other initiatives the government should have undertaken. We disagree with the HST. You don't agree with us? Fine. Here's one where you can agree. Here's one where you can say, "Yeah. Guess what? We agree with the NDP."

Why? Because most states in the United States are doing the same thing. Every other province in the eastern part of the Canada is doing the same thing in one way or another: regulating the ceiling price for gas to take the gouging out, to take the unpredictability out, to provide that weekly price where people know what to expect when they wake up in the morning to fill up, so that they don't have to worry about filling up at the last minute before they go home, when they want to see their kids or get their kids to the soccer game or whatever, and they don't have to worry that if they wait until Friday, the gas prices might be up again.

I think it's really clear, Speaker, that this is a very modest proposal. It's one that makes a lot of sense. It's not radical. As I mentioned, it exists in many, many other jurisdictions.

What we're saying is that we already have the infrastructure to put this in place. We have something called the Ontario Energy Board. They already regulate natural gas prices in this province. They already take care of electricity in this province, in terms of pricing. It's not like we have to create a whole other bureaucracy to take care of regulating gas prices. All we're saying is, let's put

a weekly ceiling in place and let's have the OEB take on that job. It makes sense, it gives people a break, it gives them predictability, it gives them reliability in prices and it's something that is long past due.

We've raised it many times here—it was in our platform. Now we're saying to the government, take some of our good ideas. This is one of the good ideas that you should run with. You can actually show the people of Ontario that, instead of crying crocodile tears when it comes to their hardships, you're prepared to do something about the struggles that everyday families are facing in this province.

I could go on. Everybody has watched the prices go up quite a bit over the last little while. They've stabilized—mind you, at a high rate—but we're really concerned that this is an ongoing issue that needs to be addressed. And it's something that is very, very simple.

I have many, many more notes, but I also have many fantastic MPPs from across this province who want to bring their voices to this issue.

Speaker, I'm going to end with one final thought, which is that sometimes doing something a little bit differently is exactly what we need to do. We have to get out of our old way of doing things. We have to actually look at new ideas and remember what it is that we're here to do. We're not here to represent oil companies. We're not here to make sure that their profits are the highest they could possibly be because they have people on the ropes over a holiday weekend or because they have people on the ropes in a small town, whether it's Woodstock or whether it's Hearst, right? It's a matter of making sure that we are actually paying attention to everyday families for a change: to their need for predictability, to their need for household budgets that they can manage and that they can keep an eye on.

That's what New Democrats want to do. We want to make life more affordable. Let's hope that the Liberals and the Conservatives do as well. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Reza Moridi: I'm pleased to rise in this House today to speak on the motion brought forward by the leader of the third party. It reads, "that, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon the McGuinty government to task the Ontario Energy Board with establishing a weekly ceiling on gas prices in order to reduce price volatility, regional price differences and tackle price gouging and other anti-consumer industry practices."

1610

Madam Speaker, as Ontario families work hard and go about their busy lives, our government has been hard at work too. We are making thoughtful choices to build a stronger economy that supports families and creates jobs across this province, and we are taking strong action for Ontario's economy.

As I understand, the motion we are debating today is aimed at achieving the same goal. However, Madam Speaker, I certainly beg to differ. We believe in taking

strong and decisive action to strengthen our economy, but we do not believe in the regulation of gasoline prices.

It has been shown that provinces that regulate the price of gas end up paying more. In the long run, this will increase the price at the pump for all Ontarians. It is important to note that this proposal is in line with the billion-dollar, gas-guzzler giveaway the NDP suggested during the campaign.

The third party wants to reward Big Oil with no mechanism to ensure companies pass savings on to consumers. They will take Ontario back to the days of dirty air and dirty water. Once again, the NDP is abandoning the health of Ontarians and their own party's progressive roots, and their plan won't work for Ontario's families.

Regulated prices will not allow consumers to immediately benefit from overnight drops in wholesale gas prices. Instead, gas and oil companies will make more profit from the overnight drops. This is another example of the NDP's irresponsible economic policy.

Madam Speaker, let's spend a couple of minutes and clarify exactly how gas prices are determined. A number of factors contribute to the determination of retail gas prices, including crude oil prices, wholesale gasoline prices and local price competition. We have no control over world oil supplies or prices. Crude oil and fuel prices in North America are highly influenced by world oil markets.

It's imperative to note that the federal government has responsibility for ensuring competition in gasoline markets. The Competition Bureau is an arm of Industry Canada. It administers the Competition Act, which among other things bans predatory pricing, collusion and abuse of dominant position. The Competition Bureau continues to investigate gasoline prices to ensure that gasoline prices are fair, as shown by the recent conviction and sentencing of three independent gasoline marketers for price-fixing in Kingston and Brockville.

The federal government held hearings in 2008 to look at (1) the applicability of the Competition Act in the gasoline market and (2) the influence speculators and investors have had on volatile commodity prices.

Three independent gasoline marketers were fined a total of \$2.035 million in March 2012 for conspiring to fix gasoline prices in Kingston and Brockville from May to November 2007. Canadian Tire, Pioneer Energy and Mr. Gas were found to have exchanged information on price strategies and agreed among themselves to follow price changes by matching major branded stations when they increased or decreased prices. In addition to the fines, the companies have been put under a court order for 10 years and are required to educate their employees on the Competition Act.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take some time at this point to discuss the potential outcomes of regulating gasoline prices. Regulating gasoline prices is not in the best interests of consumers. Historically, provinces that regulate prices tend to have higher prices than Ontario. More recently, on an ex-tax basis, prices are comparable between regulated and unregulated markets.

The five eastern provinces—Newfoundland, PEI, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick—all regulate their gasoline prices. Here are the respective prices at the pump per litre: In Newfoundland, it's 140.7 cents in the city of St. John's; in PEI, it's 134.4 cents in Charlottetown; in Quebec, it's 140.3 cents in Montreal; in Nova Scotia, in Halifax, it's 140.3 cents; in New Brunswick, it's 137.5 cent in Saint John. In BC, where they don't regulate gas prices, the price is 139.2 cents in Vancouver. More interestingly, in Ontario, in the city of Toronto, where we are, it's 130.4 cents per litre, which is the cheapest among all these major cities across the country.

The Atlantic Institute for Market Studies published a report in February 2009 that estimated that gasoline price regulation costs the Atlantic provinces from one to 1.5 cents per litre.

A March 2007 study, prepared by Gardner Pinfold Consulting Economists, estimated that regulation in Nova Scotia increased gasoline prices by 0.8 cents per litre.

Madam Speaker, our government is committed to reducing the burdens on Ontario families. We understand the struggle to make ends meet. I have a household myself to balance the budget and I know that when the price of one thing goes up, I have to make up for it somewhere else. That's why we are going after every possible investment that will create new jobs in Ontario and that's why we are working hard to reduce the burden on Ontario families.

The Ontario clean energy benefit reduces electricity costs by 10% for families, farmers, seniors and small businesses. We brought in up to \$1,025 in annual tax relief for seniors through the Ontario energy and property tax credit. And our northern Ontario energy credit is providing up to \$200 for families, helping more than half of all northerners.

At the same time, our government is committed to building a clean energy economy and making Ontario's air safer to breathe. We have closed eight coal plants and coal use is down by 90% compared to 2003, when we came into office. We'll be closing all coal plants by 2014. That is the equivalent of taking seven million cars off the road.

The opposition parties don't care about keeping Ontario's air clean and healthy. The PCs want to keep coal plants open indefinitely, have no plan to deal with climate change and don't believe in—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. Order.

The member for Richmond Hill.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Conservatives voted against the Ontario clean energy benefit.

The NDP's former leader, Howard Hampton, wrote to the Premier and asked him to keep northern coal plants open for another 25 years. The NDP cancelled all energy conservation programs and voted against bringing them back. They voted against—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Excuse me, point of order.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: She's not in her seat.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'll go to my seat, then.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Oh, I'm sorry. You're not in your seat. No point of order. Continue.

Mr. Paul Miller: Okay, I'll do it. Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Yes?

Mr. Paul Miller: Madam Speaker, I would suggest that we're talking about gas prices and we're talking about what our leader said. The member is way off topic. He's attacking the Conservatives on coal, he's attacking us on other topics. Could you ask him to speak to the agenda?

1620

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The conversation continues on the opposition day motion. You have the floor.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The NDP cancelled all energy conservation programs and they voted against bringing them back. They voted against the Clean Water Act and against banning the use and sale of cosmetic pesticides—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Just a moment.

Mr. Paul Miller: Point of order, Madam Chair: I don't want to be disrespectful, but are you listening to what he's talking about? He's talking about water. He's talking about stuff that has nothing to do with what our leader stood up and talked about.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I would ask the member to go back to the opposition day motion in his remarks. Thank you.

Mr. Reza Moridi: And when they were in government, the NDP cut the budget for the Ministry of the Environment, and now they oppose renewable energy and the feed-in tariff program. The NDP are waffling in their support for clean energy and clean air. I would suggest this motion brought forward by the leader of the third party is another example of poor choices and direction made by the party opposite.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: Over the years, under this Liberal government, Ontarians have seen their lives become more and more difficult. They saw their hydro costs skyrocket 100% with no credible explanation from this government. Failed policies have created more red tape and made it more and more difficult to start or run a business in Ontario.

Interjection: Get to the gas.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm getting to it.

The unemployed are seeing no action to create jobs and on getting this province back on track to prosperity.

Whenever we hear new announcements, we can't believe the figures any more. Thirty thousand green jobs that turned out to be temporary, each one killing four per-

manent ones, is just an example of this government's lack of credibility on the energy portfolio.

So we come, then, to gas—what everybody's been waiting for. Gas prices have been climbing, and everyone feels the effects. We use our cars every day, and for many in rural areas a car and the gas for it are some of the largest line items in the household budget.

I was the mayor of a rural township and I know firsthand the challenges that we faced on a daily basis. Unlike their urban neighbours, rural residents don't see a cent of the provincial gas tax collected from them every day. OMPF funding has remained the same since this government took office in 2003, and in some cases, like in South Glengarry, it's even less. Instead of tackling the real energy and financial issues affecting our province, this government delights in disrupting everyone's lives with wind turbines and other fanciful policy disasters.

Villages like Martintown, Williamstown, Green Valley, North Lancaster, Bainsville, Summerstown, Glen Norman and St. Raphaels used to have gas stations. Today, they're all gone. One has to drive all the way to the 401 highway in the south just to fill up—and that's just in my former township.

We know that gas prices are going up, and for many people it's proving to be a challenge, but is this NDP motion an answer? Sadly, no. The NDP motion seeks to abolish the laws of economics and takes on common sense as well. Their aim is to abolish regional differences in gas prices, which is either impossible or will just drive the prices in southern Ontario through the roof. It seeks to give unelected government appointees the power to determine how much we will pay at the pump. The Ontario Energy Board's remit is very broad and they have many active files in their portfolio. Are we seriously considering handing them the weekly assessment of the Ontario gas market and world gasoline prices, and the power to decide the maximum price we will pay that week?

Let us consider this for a moment: If there was ever a maximum cap, it would have to be sufficiently high to justify supplying gas to Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and other communities. If it isn't high enough, no one will supply gas or sell it at a loss, and stations will close.

So what difference would that make in southern Ontario? Absolutely nothing to keep the prices down, as we already pay less than people in provinces where gas is regulated. A one-size-fits-all ceiling is not a solution that fits our province and will only drive our prices up to the maximum, like it does everywhere else.

Four provinces have enacted full regulation of gas prices. They are PEI, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The effect of their regulation is not to decrease prices, and I will provide evidence of that. They regulate the profit margin that wholesalers and retailers can mark up their gasoline by. PEI sets it every two weeks, and the rest on a weekly basis. All maintain some system by which they can change the price at any time if the market dictates it.

Unlike what the NDP would do with this motion, all four provinces I mentioned base their retail gasoline price on the so-called New York Harbor price. That isn't the price of oil; it's the price of actual refined unleaded gasoline traded on the international market. The technical term is the New York Harbor RBOB gasoline future. Try as they may, the NDP can do nothing to alter how that price is set, unless they plan on conquering the world and shutting down the gasoline trade—hard to do with an army of 17, however passionate. To this world price, provinces add 10 cents per litre federal excise tax; a wholesaler's margin; provincial tax, if applicable; retailer's minimum and maximum margins; and the regional markups, if applicable.

Speaking of regions, the last time I checked, Nova Scotia was tiny. They have six zones. Depending on the distance from Halifax and its port, the difference between the maximum price in zone 1 and zone 6 is one cent. In the space of 180 miles, the price difference is one cent.

There is a map of Ontario on the ground floor in the east wing, right by the NDP offices. If they are so bent on regulation, how many extra cents will it cost to send it to Sudbury, Nipissing or Thunder Bay?

On average, the wholesale and retail margins in the four Atlantic provinces are close to 12 cents a litre in total. This week's Halifax price was 131.6 cents a litre. The maximum profit made by the companies on that litre is 12 cents, give or take.

Speaker, let's look at Toronto. On May 11, according to some sources, the gas station at Dupont and Ossington posted a regular price of 127.6 cents; less the HST, that becomes 112.9 cents; less the gas tax, 98.2 cents; and less the federal excise, 88.2 cents. The world price or RBOB price was 79 cents, so less than 10 cents.

My NDP colleagues may not be strong at math, since they would clearly see that in some parts of Ontario, companies are making a smaller profit on every litre of gas than they would make in a regulated province.

Timing is not on the NDP's side either. When they came out with their idea of a price cap back during the election, Quebec had done the number-crunching and analysis for them. A report from the Quebec Energy Board in 2011—which is on the Internet—examined the proposal to regulate gas prices in Quebec, based on the same arguments used by the NDP today. Quebec's board looked at every aspect of the provincial regulations already enacted elsewhere and found something very interesting: Regulation didn't do one thing to reduce prices. Average weekly prices in Montreal and any given regulated provincial capital tracked each other perfectly over the past few years. Moreover, when world gasoline prices decreased, consumers were left overpaying for their gas until the regulator changed the price. When prices increased, suppliers were left selling at a lower margin until the regulator intervened.

This may shock some of my colleagues in the chamber. The same province that regulates font sizes on billboards and advertisements decided against regulating gas prices. I have to repeat myself: Quebec decided

against regulating something. The board said that Quebec is too big to enact anything meaningful, and the market was too large, and there was no added benefit to regulation. Quebec's only contribution to regulation is a decades-old provision to set a floor price, which is something that we don't want to get into.

The minimum prices this week are 129.5 cents in Halifax; 124 cents in Charlottetown; 133.4 cents in St. John's, Newfoundland; and 129.7 cents in New Brunswick, plus 2.5 cents delivery. Most of these prices were set on May 11. On that same day in Ontario, we had gas stations selling regular in Cornwall at 122.9 cents, 127.6 cents in downtown Toronto, 125.4 cents in Kitchener and 131.9 in Sudbury.

I'm sure my colleagues will let you know more about the details of various regulations, so let me tell you about gouging. Real gouging occurs when consumers do not know what the real price is. It takes two to tango, so for gouging to occur, we must have a dishonest retailer. Only recently, three gas providers in Brockville and Kingston were handed fines and punishments for gas fixing. There are rules against that.

1630

The NDP wants us to believe Ontarians are being gouged by oil companies. Nothing could be further from the truth. In 2000, the Ontario PC Party sent a travelling commission across this province on the topic of gas prices. People were anxious and wanted answers. My colleague from Durham will be able to give us more details later, as he was on that commission and drafted some of the recommendations, which are still excellent policy.

This province must strive to have the best-educated consumers in the country. The NDP will pander the easy fixes without regard for the consequences. Nobody in this chamber can change the price of RBOB gasoline at the New York harbour, or the world price of oil. What we can do and should do is ensure transparency in how fair prices are set across the province. A consumer who knows what a truly fair price is for today will spot a gouger from a mile away.

Smart consumers? Any day. More pen-pushers and bureaucrats running our lives; more government bungling? No thanks.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

Mr. Paul Miller: I must say, I've been amazed with some of the statements that have been going on in this House. It's just overwhelming.

But I'll tell you, Madam Speaker, they say they can't do anything about it. Isn't this special? The federal government in Ottawa under Mr. Harper—I'm sure he has people who represent him who go to talk to OPEC, the oil producers of the world. Why is the cost so high? Well, we'll start in Ottawa and work our way west.

The reason it's high is because we are making people in Saudi Arabia, Libya and all the other oil-producing countries very, very rich. A very few people are very, very rich, and most of their population is suffering in

poverty. We are doing that. We go along with this all the time.

How do we correct this problem? They're not the only people that can produce oil. There are enough oil reserves and enough gas reserves and other sources of energy in Canada to last us about 500 years. All we have to do is tap into it. Then, other than the fact that we're making them rich, the sources in North America are huge; our alternative energy sources are plentiful. We're even working on new ones.

Now let's talk about maintenance costs. Maintenance costs in the old days in the refineries, when I was a tradesman, were very labour-intensive and expensive, but now the refineries are run with maybe four or five guys. They have computers; they have technology. Where it would have taken 200 or 300 guys to run a refinery, a handful can run it now: more profit for the shareholders, more profit for big business, more profit for the rich guys. That's what's going on.

When people stand up here and say that the NDP is trying to lead the public in a different direction that's going to cost them more money, that's absolute nonsense. We are trying to save the people of this province and this country money.

Why aren't we developing our own alternative? They want to build a pipeline in Alaska down here, and now the President of the United States has done a 180. He didn't want it at first because he didn't want it going through their prime lands, North Dakota, South Dakota. He didn't want it to go through, that pipeline. Now he's done a 180, realizing that he's being gouged by all these other countries. He wants to be self-sufficient, so what's he doing? He's going to okay the pipeline to go through those cherished areas, the Badlands and all that in the northern United States. So there's a lot of stuff going on here, really.

Now, how does it filter down to the province? Now we're moving west towards Toronto. They talk about the prices. Our leader is simply saying that if a person in Toronto gets a week's notice on prices that may go up because somebody burped in Libya or something happened in Venezuela—well, I've got news for you, Speaker. The bottom line here is this: Do you know that on all the oil crises and all the problems we had in North America the last four times, they didn't even tap into their reserves? The Americans did not even tap into their reserves. Who's getting gouged? We are. Who's getting rich? Very few. That's what's going on here.

Then, yes, there is the odd retailer that may take advantage of the situation. You tell me how it can go up six to 15 cents a litre at 11:59, and at 12:01 it goes up. How? What happened? Did somebody's refinery break down in Libya? Did a few tankers overturn on the 401? I don't think so. It's called gouging, and it goes on all the time, and we keep taking it and taking it.

The government in Ottawa does nothing. This government does nothing. The people wonder, "Why am I paying \$1.40?" Then you go up north, and it's even more.

What's going on here? Someone's playing games. We've got a shell game going on here between the oil-producing countries, between our governments and between the manufacturers of the oil in Canada and the States.

We actually ship it away, too. We ship it down to the States. They're saying—

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: I remember when it was like 50 cents a litre. I remember when it was 32 cents a litre. Now it's \$1.60. Their maintenance has gone down, their production levels have gone up, and their reserves are intact—never been touched. Then they stand up and say, "Oh, they're trying to create a problem here."

I'm going to let other people speak. It is extremely frustrating, Speaker, to have people stand up here and stand up for the oil companies, stand up for big business, stand up for the people gouging the people of Ontario. You people should be ashamed of yourselves.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's always a delight to have the opportunity to get a few words on the record about gas prices across the province of Ontario.

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Well, to the member from Prince Edward-Hastings, I want to give him that information. The time is 4:45 p.m. I just want to let everybody know in this House that the price of a litre of gasoline close to my home, at Pioneer on Lansdowne Street East, four blocks from my home, is \$1.216. Peterborough has some of the lowest gasoline prices in the province of Ontario, and we're very proud of that.

Applause.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Last Friday, I was in beautiful Stirling, Ontario. I got a standing ovation from the nice crowd with my friend the member from Prince Edward-Hastings, and this afternoon I got a standing ovation from the caucus of the third party, so we must be doing very well.

Speaker, Ontario has always asked the federal government to put some teeth in the Competition Act. Just today, I asked legislative research to take a look at something. There's a great letter that was presented by a former, very distinguished member of this House when he was the Minister of Government Services: the Honourable Gerry Phillips. I just want to quote from this letter. He sent it to Ms. Sheridan Scott, the commissioner of the Competition Bureau of Canada. He said in this letter, "Hurricane Katrina was a tragedy and had a deep impact on all of us. While the disruptions experienced in the wake of Katrina and speculation about Hurricane Rita are bound to impact on fuel prices, it fails to explain why prices in Ontario rose more than those in neighbouring states in the US. It fails to explain why prices are varying so severely between various cities, towns and regions across the province. It fails to explain why prices were so quick to go up, yet are so slow to go down, especially in some regions of the province."

This was in 2005. "Prices in the Windsor-Chatham corridor have been seen as high as \$1.80 per litre, completely counter to the current market trend. There are reports of gasoline charges in Waterloo as high as \$1.99"—hopefully not for the by-election. "These do not reflect the market as a whole and give consumers the false impression that there is a shortage of gasoline."

"The federal Competition Bureau needs to exercise its authority to ensure that Ontarians are paying a fair price for fuel across the province. We need to be sure that consumers are being protected from an excess of market power that is concentrated in the hands of a small number of energy companies."

"To that end, I am requesting that the Competition Bureau investigate the refining, wholesale and retail gasoline markets in Ontario, and report its findings promptly as this is a concern that affects all Ontarians" and everyday households.

"Sincerely,

"Gerry Phillips

"Minister of Government Services

"Government of Ontario."

Mr. Phillips was right, back in 2005, and that sound approach is just as right today.

I am very, very pleased that we have a new commissioner of competition in Ottawa, a person I have great respect for, Melanie Aitken.

I want to quote from what she said on April 13, 2012, commenting on price-fixing that occurred in 2007 in Belleville, Ontario:

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"We are committed to pursuing those who engage in anti-competitive behaviour that harms Canadian business and consumers," said Melanie Aitken, Commissioner of Competition. "Illegal agreements between competitors to fix prices deny consumers the benefits of competitive prices and choice."

"On March 20, 2012, Pioneer Energy LP, Canadian Tire Corp. and Mr. Gas pleaded guilty to fixing the price of retail gasoline from May to November 2007 in Kingston," Brockville and Belleville "and were fined a total of \$2 million."

"Price-fixing conspiracies are difficult to detect and prove. High or identical prices are not in and of themselves evidence of criminal activity. There must be evidence that competitors have made an illegal agreement to set those prices. When there are substantiated allegations of wrongdoing in the marketplace, the bureau will not hesitate to take" firm action."

Madam Speaker, you can certainly see that this is the purview, of course, of the federal Competition Bureau. I certainly encourage—

Hon. James J. Bradley: What are the prices in Nova Scotia?

Mr. Jeff Leal: In Nova Scotia, the prices are high. The Minister of the Environment just asked me a question here with Darrell Dexter and the NDP government. In Nova Scotia, the prices on April 24,

2012, were \$1.03 a litre of gasoline. So that compares to 121.6 cents in Peterborough.

What the NDP is telling me is that they want to fix prices in Ontario at 140.3 cents and gouge the little guy. You know, what have you done for the little guy lately? When you see the concept of fixing those high prices at 140.3 and the little guy in Peterborough who can get it at 121.6, this is not to the time to regulate gas prices at a provincial level.

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Yes, it's interesting enough that the Minister of the Environment—I think we should ask the new federal leader of the NDP, Mr. Mulcair, the former Liberal environment minister of the province of Quebec, to stand up in Ottawa and demand that we have a select committee, perhaps, to look into price-fixing in Ottawa, take the evidence from the federal competition commissioner and get to the bottom of the price of gas. Don't regulate it. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm very pleased to participate in this important debate. I just want to make sure that the viewers are familiar with what the opposition day motion is: "That, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon the McGuinty government to task the Ontario Energy Board with establishing a weekly ceiling on gas prices in order to reduce price volatility, regional price differences and tackle price gouging and other anti-consumer industry practices"—a laudable goal and a topic that's been talked about by almost every party that's ever served in public office. I think there's a lot of contradiction in that. I think the marriage between the McGuinty government and the NDP is coming to an end.

Now, let's put it this way. If I look at my riding of Durham, I can tell you right now that I've had several calls in the last while on this. Over my 17 years, I would say every year it fluctuates, and the number of calls is usually an indicator of, are we reaching a threshold where the government should do something about it? I want to thank Tracey Richards, Dena and Larry Thompson, Tim Smith, Kevin Kuipers, Brian Hammond and Ronald Mitchell, who have recently been in touch with my constituency office.

The reason I mention that is that I often refer them to the fine work that was done under the leadership of then Minister, now Senator, Bob Runciman. Senator Runciman has been very ably replaced by the next speaker on the Conservative side, on the Tim Hudak team, Steve Clark, so I look forward to his remarks. In fact, his remarks are going to be longer than he thought.

I think it's important to look back at the study commissioned by then Minister Runciman, the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations. On June 29, 2000, the task force report was issued. I was privileged to be the co-chair of that task force in June, and it was a knowledge experience; I'll say that. I was privileged to serve with Joe Tascona, Ted Chudleigh and the Honour-

able Dan Newman, who then became the Minister of the Environment. We heard from a litany of consumers here. I would say the CAA was certainly there, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Canadian Petroleum Products Institute—I could go on, but there are pages and pages of people that we heard from.

At the end of it all, we actually consulted with other jurisdictions. We actually ended up going—Mr. von Finckenstein was the head of the Competition Bureau at that time, and we appeared before the Competition Bureau in Ottawa.

We came up with 14—with the help of the delegations we heard from and the experts we worked with, we came up with a very convincing report. Laughingly—I mean this humorously—we felt that we wrestled the price to the ceiling, because the longer we consulted, the higher the price went. It's a fact. It was quite—the headlines at the time are a bit disarming. In fact, Minister Runciman was somewhat disappointed with our work, I should say, at the time.

On a serious matter, though, this is a chronic problem. If you put it into some context, we came up with 14 recommendations that I'd like to just briefly review, and I'll tell you why. The recommendations, I believe, are a good piece of advice for the current government. They don't respond to the motion by the NDP, but I would say that the 14 recommendations did talk about day-ahead pricing. That was one of the issues that would take some of the perception of volatility when people fill up their car.

What you find out—actually, government revenue is made of really two parts of tax, and it's important to put that in context. Of the price of gas, about 30 cents a litre is tax. Now, what the McGuinty government did in a stealthful manner is that they increased the price of a litre of gas overnight by about 6 cents. That's with harmonizing of the HST. That's what they did.

Now, in fairness, the federal government, at the time this was going into place, were in the process—the GST was 7%. They had an election promise—Tories keep their promises, unlike Premier McGuinty—that they were going to reduce the HST. A lot of people were upset with that decision. I personally applaud the decision that Minister Flaherty made and Prime Minister Harper, and I'll tell you why.

This is a very good example of how it affects the lowest income the most. That's a tax on consumption. A consumption tax affects people. The lower the income, the more of their income is spent. In fact, anything under \$40,000 is all spent. It's actually taxed more than somebody who's putting \$100,000 in a trust fund that is never taxed until some future date, and that could be when they're in Italy on some wine tour spending the money. Do you understand? It's tragic, really, when you look at the unfairness of the tax system in that respect. But he did the right thing. He reduced it over the time.

The Liberal plan, I believe, in the long run—they're going to slip this in, I don't know when. Probably they're going to harmonize the HST to 15%.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, no, that's what they're going to do. I'll bring some messaging on that.

The NDP won't escape the complications here either. I got some information today, when I looked online. It turns out there's a bit of an online discussion going on between Mr. Mulcair as well as the Liberals in Ottawa. They're actually arguing now, as we speak, to add a carbon tax to gas. Are you aware of that? Mr. Mulcair is. That's going to add about 5 cents to the price of gas.

Now, if you want it both ways, you have to look at those future considerations. The price—a lot of it is controlled in some provinces through regulation that tends to be a price drag. In other words, it's slow up and slow down. In our market, it's fast up and slow down.

Here's the real issue: The gas itself, the actual product itself without the tax discussion, is kind of a global price. It's set at the New York harbour price, and we're price takers. What they do is say the system has about 15 days of inventory from New York to the refinery and from the refinery to the retailer. In that system of inventory, they're always pricing the litre that's just being sold this minute. That's why the price is up fast. When it goes up in New York, it goes up at the gas pump.

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They have regions across the province of Ontario, and those regions vary. The farther you are from refining, the more there is a transportation cost component to the price. The biggest price taker in this whole thing is the province, for sure.

I could break that down. It's 14.7 cents, I think. I'm looking for my notes here. It's 14.7 cents. Now, it's cents. It's important to follow this one here, because it's not a percentage. It's 14.7 cents, the ad valorem, and it's 10 cents per litre federally. On top of all that, there's the HST, so 29.7 cents per litre is actually tax—or more. Here's the real issue: The real issue is not the tax. The one thing that Premier McGuinty has control of is actually the ad valorem tax.

If you look at the statistics of the consumption of gas, the revenue for the province actually doesn't go up with the price, except the percentage, the HST portion, because ad valorem tax—the more you buy—if it was \$5 a litre, they'd still only get 14.7 cents. Where they gained on this was the HST. That's where they gained, because if you look at the consumption, as price goes up, the consumption of gas goes down; people decide to take the bus or not take that trip on Sunday or whatever. But with the percentage tax, the HST, the provinces gain. So they really have a double gain on this one. If they want to look at it, that's their business.

Some provinces—and I have a chart here—they have a reduced, or do not charge the HST portion on gas. What Premier McGuinty has done is, you've got this provincial benefit, the Ontario benefit, which is giving you back some of the exceptionally high costs of electricity and other energy.

I'm surprised today that Mr. Bentley isn't here to hear these arguments, because these are important discussions on a file that he should be concerned—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask you to withdraw referencing someone not here.

Mr. John O'Toole: Withdraw that the minister is not here? Okay, I withdraw.

The previous minister, the Minister of the Environment, is here.

Hon. James J. Bradley: A very quick point of order, Madam Speaker: I think you would recognize that he's at estimates at the present time, and that's why he's not here.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): That's not a point of order.

Continue.

Mr. John O'Toole: He's probably not answering questions there, either.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Beaches—East York on a point of order.

Mr. Michael Prue: A point of order, Madam Chair: I am the Chair of estimates, and the members of estimates are sitting behind the minister. The meeting had to be adjourned in order to accommodate the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): That's not a point of order.

Continue.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Why would you interrupt this?

Mr. John O'Toole: It is certainly cutting into my speaking time.

Let's look at the trends here. The member from Peterborough did say—and I should say that I have occasion to be in Peterborough quite often, visiting family and things, and here's the issue: Peterborough does have the cheapest gas.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: I shouldn't broadcast it, but basically he's right: It's the Pioneer station on Lansdowne Street. There are about three of them that have the cheapest gas. It was 121 cents when I bought gas there on Sunday, I believe it was.

The other part is, when you look at other provinces—I have the trends, and I think our other member mentioned it as well—if you look at it in a relative sense, and this is the price by major city, basically you've got to stay away from Quebec. I don't mean that to be rude, but they have probably one of the highest prices. They have the highest tax. Basically the highest price in gas is Quebec, and I would say that Vancouver is very high too.

They are also setting the table for the next round for the consumer, called the carbon tax, and what's wrong with the carbon tax? Where's the money? What are they doing with it? Every time they say it's a tax and it's for the environment, be wary—be very, very wary, and I'll tell you why.

Originally, the tax on gas was for roads, and if you look at the general revenue, they spend about 65% to 70% of the revenue from gas on roads. I would say to

you that it's spending more on buses than roads. It's going into transit, which could be a whole other debate.

I looked at what's going on across the provinces. In Halifax, the NDP made a decision just recently—this is from the media today—they will not slash the gas tax. This is the NDP government. They need the revenue.

Most of the programs you talk about take money. Where do you get the money? Money is tax. All of the government's money is basically a tax of some sort.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: Those are the decisions you want to make. If you tax the oil companies, they'll go elsewhere.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask you to speak through the Chair.

Mr. John O'Toole: I intend to do that.

I would say, the average retail gas price in Nova Scotia varied from—in January, it was 126 cents and now it's 144.9. So that's a raging debate. It's higher than ours by a considerable—20 cents a litre. You wonder why it's always taxed. Government intervention—“Manitoba Budget Cuts Spending, Raises Taxes.” There's another NDP government. What are they doing? Well, they are raising taxes.

Interjection: It's a mantra.

Mr. John O'Toole: Oh, yeah; they love it. Basically, I would say that both of the parties on the left of our position have a mantra. It's basically, “Get as much taxes as you can so you can spend it.”

I listen to question period every day, Madam Speaker. Every day in question period, we're wondering where the money went from Ornge and where the money went on some of these solar plants in Windsor to create all these jobs. They waste more money, and it's the poor taxpayer who's taking it in the ear. I can't believe it.

Here's what they're doing in Manitoba. They've decided, the NDP government in Manitoba—this is an indication here—to raise taxes by 2.5 cents a litre. That's the plan. I guess, when they summarize their debate they're going to come up with a conclusive argument that will say, “We have no alternative.” What we said in our report and I'm saying to you now: If the government had any insight at all or wanted to be respectful to the arguments being made, it would ask me to chair a commission. This would be something—I wouldn't be in the House as regularly speaking, but—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Are you fishing for it, John?

Mr. John O'Toole: No, no, no. I'd be happy to, because I had the experience of this previous report that we issued back in 2000, and I'm sure we could appear before the Competition Bureau. I think it's appropriate, because what we're calling on here is for the Competition Bureau to make sure that there is no price-gouging, market-rigging or whatever else is going on. But you've got to assume responsibility; about 30% of the price is squarely on Premier McGuinty's desk. He's the one that is taking the biggest slice, more so than the petroleum companies.

HST—look at the gas. It's five to 10 cents a litre that they're getting. And they do nothing and get it. The oil companies—you could argue with them.

Who are the oil companies, by the way? They're shareholders. There's no Mr. Esso. They're shareholders. Who are the shareholders? They're pension plans. Who are the pension plans? They're probably unions and public sector. So you can deal with them the way you wish. They are taxing—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Just a moment. I'd ask, if you have conversations, to take them out of the chamber.

Continue, member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much. I did want to get, in the very few minutes I have left here, to the recommendations. Some of them are quite good. Recommendation one is forwarding our submissions to the Competition Bureau with a request for an immediate investigation. That was recommendation number one.

Recommendation two is that the provincial tax collection process is questionable as well—and monitoring of gas prices and publicly posting the monitoring. What's the big secret here? When I went to speak on this, I had to look a lot of stuff up. It took time.

Notice of price increases: This is some good advice. Day-ahead pricing is what it's called.

Mr. Paul Miller: Day-ahead?

Mr. John O'Toole: Day-ahead pricing. It tells you today what the price is going to be tomorrow. It's a good idea. You fill up on the way home or take transit. That's a good idea as well.

Corporate accountability: The government has the right to audit there now.

Transparency and competition in ownership: There is virtually a vertical monopoly in the large capital investment that's necessary.

Fair and accurate and clear information for consumers; put violators on the defensive; shift the burden of proof: That's another thing.

With that, there were 14 recommendations.

Steve Clark wanted four minutes, but he is going to have a bigger video tonight on YouTube, so keep your eye open.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

1700

Mr. John Vanthof: It's been an honour for me to speak to the House today on gasoline prices. I've heard a lot of very varied views, and I'd like to bring it back to my home area, because people in Timiskaming-Cochrane say, “Well, you know what? If gas prices go up, you can use public transportation.” Well, you know what? We hardly have any. If you want to get to Toronto, soon we won't have a train, so we can't even use public transportation on the train. So it's pretty important to us. Right now, we have no guarantee what the bus prices are going to be either. Once again, we are very concerned about gas prices.

I'd like to thank the Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce, who did a study last year about gas prices in my region. There were four months last year where Temiskaming Shores had the highest gas prices not in Ontario but in Canada.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: In Canada. I heard someone say, "You know what? It's all about how far you are from the refinery." But gas to the south of us is cheaper, and gas to the north of us is cheaper.

Mr. Paul Miller: What happened?

Mr. John Vanthof: What happened to the transportation part?

Now, I heard the member for Durham say, stay away from Quebec.

Interjection: Honourable member.

Mr. John Vanthof: He is an honourable man. I really get along with him well, but he said, stay away from Quebec—stay away from Quebec for gas prices.

When you live in New Liskeard, most people tank in Quebec because as of today—and it's always like this. Okay? Gas in New Liskeard today is \$1.37.9. Fifteen minutes away in that high-priced, regulated regime, taxed regime of the province de Quebec—

Mr. Paul Miller: How much?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's \$1.27.9.

Mr. Paul Miller: What happened? What happens?

Mr. John Vanthof: Someone mentioned, "Well, we fixed this with the northern energy credit." But the northern energy credit is on a lot of issues, and one other issue in our area—a lot of people don't have access to natural gas, so they heat with oil. When you heat with oil, and you have no access to public transportation, \$200 a year doesn't make a big hit.

So the one thing that we, in my area, are really pushing for is that the price—and it's in this motion—should be regulated weekly, but it should be regulated regionally, because it shouldn't be that within 20 minutes or within an hour that it makes 10 cents of difference. It shouldn't be, because it doesn't cost 10 cents to transport gas one hour.

Folks, we can all have our big plans and our big ideas, but at the end of the day, someone has to take responsibility and make sure that parts of the province like ours aren't discriminated against continually. If you're not going to give us a train, at least have reasonable gas prices.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm happy to speak to this. Here's why we ought not to support this opposition day motion.

First of all, all problems, all issues, have a context, so let's see what today's actual context of this motion is to fix the price of gas. Today, this is the situation.

On April 24, 2012, Newfoundland—they've got regulation there—in St. John's, Newfoundland, \$1.40.7 a litre; Prince Edward Island—they've got regulation—April 24, 2012, \$1.34.4 in Charlottetown; Quebec, which

has a partial ban on cost-selling in Montreal: on April 24, \$1.40.3; Nova Scotia pump price, April 24—yes, they started their regulation in 2006, and they're up to \$1.40.3 today. New Brunswick started some regulation in July 2006 also, and in St. John on April 24 they were up to \$1.37.5. British Columbia, which doesn't have any oil—it has to bring it in from the west or from other parts of the North American continent—no regulation, \$1.39.2 in Vancouver. Here in Toronto, Ontario, on April 24, 2012, at the pump in an unregulated market, \$1.30.4, the lowest in the country. They are the lowest in the country. And I'm told today by my good colleague from Scarborough—Agincourt that an hour or so ago, the price here in Toronto is now—

Ms. Soo Wong: It's \$1.28.

Mr. David Zimmer: It's \$1.28 a litre. We are collapsing—so I ask myself the question: Why is the NDP bringing this motion forward? Well, you know, they're just trying to grab some cheap headlines in the paper that the NDP is going to stand up for people and they're going to freeze gas prices, because it's the start of the long weekend. It's the start of the long weekend, and people are going to be filling up their tanks. They're going to be paying \$1.30, or maybe they're going to be paying \$1.32, maybe \$1.28. Nobody likes to be—I get annoyed when I've got to fill up my tank. I'm going to be driving north this weekend, and if gas is \$1.30 or \$1.32, I'm going to fill it up and I'm going to say—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order.

Continue, member.

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm going to say, "This is really annoying." Just out of losing my temper and being a little annoyed, and if I don't think the thing through, I might even say, for a nanosecond, "I wish they'd freeze prices." But, you know, it's a bad idea. It's a bad idea.

Do you know why it's a bad idea? It's a bad idea because all of the academic studies, all of the economists, all of the independent think tanks, to a person, throughout North America say that freezing gas prices, regulating gas prices, does not work. What it does is it drives down production and in fact ultimately ends up driving up prices.

So I say to the NDP, if you want a real headline grabber now, in addition to this standing up and trying to fuel the fires and saying, "We're in favour of freezing gas prices," maybe if you really want some headlines you should bring in an opposition day motion to freeze the price of milk. That would get you a real headline. Maybe you should bring in an opposition day motion that you're going to freeze the price of bread. Think of the headlines that that's going to get you. How about chocolate bars? The NDP is going to freeze the price of chocolate bars. There's some headline grabbers for you. Ah, but here's one that will appeal: Freeze the price of beer. Freeze the price of beer.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. I'd ask the member to keep his remarks to the purpose of the opposition day motion.

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm just giving some comparables. If they're going to freeze the price of gas, there are lots of other things. It's the thin edge of the wedge. Once you freeze the price of gas, maybe they're going to freeze the price of toilet paper. Maybe you should think about freezing the price of men's and women's underwear. Think of the headline that would—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I've asked the member to keep his comments within the context—
Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. Order.

I've asked you to make sure that your comments are within the context of the opposition day motion. I'd remind you of that. Make sure that they're within the context of the motion.

Mr. David Zimmer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Anyway, methinks the opposition, to paraphrase Shakespeare, doth protest too much.

Anyway, the reality is that gasoline prices are a federal responsibility. The Competition Bureau, under the Competition Act, handles the regulation of gasoline. The Competition Bureau is an arm of Industry Canada. It administers the Competition Act, and one of the responsibilities is to ban predatory pricing, collusion, the abuse of a dominant commercial position, and the like. Of course, the federal responsibilities are quite clear, and they have been regulating the price of gasoline—not regulating the price of gasoline, but stepping in where they have found abuses.

1710

In some of the debate this afternoon, we heard about some issues in Kingston and in Brockville involving Canadian Tire and Pioneer Energy, where the Competition Bureau stepped in and brought down the hammer. They brought down the hammer because there were isolated cases of collusion, price fixing and so on. To keep an eye on the price of gasoline—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order.

To the member for Willowdale, to continue.

Mr. David Zimmer: Thank you. So it is a federal responsibility and the federal government is on to this like a hammer.

The other issue is how the price of gas is determined. The opposition party—they're arguing this motion and supporting it—somehow think that Ontario, all by itself, and Queen's Park, this Legislature, can somehow control the price of gas through regulating the market and so forth and so on.

You know, there is no gasoline that comes from Ontario. It comes from offshore. It comes from the Middle East. It comes from western Canada. The factors that go into calculating the price of a litre of gas here in Ontario, for the most part, are largely, if not completely, deter-

mined elsewhere: in the United States, in the Middle East, in Nigeria, in western Canada.

What would the effect of this NDP motion be? Well, it would somehow create some extra-territorial authority that they think this province has; that we will somehow pick up the telephone, we will pass a piece of legislation, and we will dictate the pricing of gasoline as it comes from the Middle East or as it comes from Alberta or as it comes from the US.

This is just pie in the sky, and I come back to my original remarks. The only reason to bring this motion forward today is to catch some cheap headlines. It seems to me they've been doing it every year at about this time, at the beginning of the summer, typically at the beginning of a long weekend, to grab some cheap headlines.

I'm going to vote against this because this is the thin edge of the wedge. I know the Speaker didn't like me referencing this, but you know, if you're going to do it for gasoline, do it for men's and women's underwear, do it for chocolate bars, do it for bread. This is a silly motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It has been some riveting debate this afternoon, hasn't it?

I'm very pleased to be able to provide a few comments on the record in regard to the motion from the third party. Right off the top, I want to say that I'm not going to be supporting this motion. But you know, I'm pleased that the leader of the third party tabled it, because I think it's important that we have this debate. I think the people of Ontario want us to have some dialogue and debate.

You know, we mentioned today—my leader, Tim Hudak, and our energy critic, Vic Fedeli—we tabled a white paper, *Paths to Prosperity*, because I think we need to be able to put some of these bold ideas out in front of people and have that discussion. That's part of being elected to this place.

And in the spirit of the member for Peterborough—he spoke earlier about gas prices in his riding—I want members of the House to know that just around the corner from my home, at the Real Canadian Superstore in Brockville, I can buy, if I was in my riding, at my home, a litre of gas for \$1.288 today in Brockville.

The other thing I want to put on the record, Speaker, is that I know a number of members have referenced the March 2012 federal Competition Bureau charge for some gas stations in my area and in the city where I live, in Brockville. They were fined \$2 million. But what seems to be lost in this debate is that they were actually charged for gas below the price, so they were charged for giving people a break at the pump. I think some of the media reports have missed that point.

Again, I am pleased to join in the debate today. I'm glad that it's being discussed. Quite frankly, I had a desire to start the conversation on gas prices, based on concerns from people in my riding, and I want to thank a number of them: Adrian and Michelle Starkey, who

wrote me; and also, I think the original one I referenced a few weeks ago in the House, Steve Connors from Kemptville. Many folks have sent me messages on Twitter, posted messages on Facebook, sent me emails and called my office expressing that concern.

The dialogue I wanted to start was actually a couple of weeks ago, on April 23 and 24, based on those comments from my constituents, where I posed a couple of questions to the Minister of Consumer Services. I'm still actually waiting for the minister to utter the word "gasoline." She did say a lot during those two days, but primarily they were discussions about cellphones and funerals and trips. Again, she didn't actually ever mention the word "gasoline."

I've had lots of comments from constituents in my riding. I know the member for Durham mentioned some of the YouTube clips. One constituent who viewed them the other day wrote to me yesterday, and he said he "never heard anyone work so hard to avoid an answer to those two clips."

However, the minister's responses, I think, spoke volumes on how the government has their priorities. As long as they keep collecting taxes on motorists when they fill up at the pump, I think everything is just fine, in their opinion, over on that side of the House.

A number of speakers have spoken about the Victoria Day weekend. When you're involved in a long weekend—in this case, the official start of the summer season—we're all waiting for, and some of us are dreading, that inevitable spike at the gas pumps. Like every motorist, I have to say that I have scratched my head when, out of the blue, the price shoots up, like it did last week in my riding. In Brockville, one day last week, the prices went from 121.9 cents to 130 cents in a matter of a few hours. That, as we all know, is nine cents a litre. But all my constituents who write also point out what that means for a gallon, and when you look at the increase in Brockville last week, it was a staggering 40-cents-a-gallon fluctuation just in that one day.

I'm afraid, though, from our perspective and from my perspective, that while it's great for us to debate this NDP motion, I don't have the confidence that it's going to fix the problem that many members have discussed. It could provide some short-term insulation from price swings, but I think, when everything settles out, which is the case in some other provinces, we're going to be faced with that higher price. I just don't think that that's what consumers want from their government and from their politicians. The unethical behaviour of some of the retailers—to try to implement the regulations that are proposed—I don't think that bureaucracy and more red tape is going to solve this problem.

I certainly think that the motion misses the mark when you involve the Ontario Energy Board and have it responsible for the price at the pump. I cannot imagine going back to Leeds–Grenville and saying to them that I supported a motion that gave the people who are over-seeing our electricity prices the opportunity to now set gas prices. You know what? I think what I'd have to do is

I'd have to stop at the Superstore gas bar, fill up my car and get the heck out of town, because I think they'd drive me crazy with all the phone calls. That's the problem. We have to look at consumer protection. When I asked the minister to look at what the federal Competition Bureau was doing—what's the problem with the minister engaging the federal government and having that discussion? The member for Durham made some exceptional points today on the results of his commission, and I know that the member for Durham and some of the other members—my predecessor was involved with that discussion. They sent some recommendations to the federal government.

1720

Folks expect that we've got a minister. The federal government doesn't have a Ministry of Consumer Services. We have a minister. We have a minister who's supposed to look at consumer protection. That's why, when I stood up in the House, I directed my questions to her.

Mr. John Yakabuski: What did she say?

Mr. Steve Clark: Well, as I said, she spoke about cellphones and funerals and a bunch of other things—never uttered the word "gasoline." So while I appreciate the issue and the fact that the timing is geared towards the Victoria Day weekend—again, as politicians, I know our federal counterparts get the same phone calls we get. I would hope they would get more than we do on this issue. But we're the ones that are accessible. We as politicians all attend events in our ridings. I'll tell you, I heard loud and clear from my folks last weekend after that nine-cents-a-litre spike.

Again, we have a role that I think the Minister of Consumer Services can play in terms of engaging the Competition Bureau about what role they can play. Some of my constituents have called the federal Competition Bureau to engage them. They essentially say that we're silent here in the province. So I think there is a role for us to play.

There's also, I believe, a role at the ministry because they do provide education on some other consumer protection issues, yet they are silent when it comes to the fluctuations in gas prices. I do believe that if we are going to have a minister and a ministry that are supposed to stand up for consumer protection, the very least that they can do—the very least—is to help provide that education and understanding on how prices are provided in the province of Ontario. I would hope that, regardless of what the vote is today, the ministry would still engage the federal Competition Bureau to at least open that dialogue on the subject.

As I said, Speaker, I'm not going to support this motion, although I am glad that we are having this discussion. I tried to spark the discussion at the end of April, and I have to tell you, I was extremely frustrated.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Since October, I have learned a lot of things in this House, in this Legislature, but today is maybe one of the more telling learning experiences. I learned today that there is only one party in this Legislature that's willing to stand up for consumers that are being faced with gas gouging in this province, and it's right here: the Ontario New Democratic Party. That's maybe the most telling thing that I have learned since October. The proof is in the pudding.

To the viewers at home, they don't want me to tell you that. They do not want me to showcase that they are not willing to stand up, don't have the guts to stand up, to the oil and gas companies in this province, and never will, really. We've heard it from not only the government side but also the official opposition—not a backbone in their bodies to stand up once and for all.

I'll point to some history here. In 1994, guess what gas prices were? Forty-nine cents a litre. In 2000, when the Harris government took over, it jumped to 72 cents a litre. So today in Windsor it's about \$1.28.

We've heard nothing on either side of this House, the opposition or the government side, of any willingness to tackle the gouging and collusion that goes on within our international gas pricing structure. Yet here we are, the small party that punches above its weight, no doubt, each and every day, ready to propose a modest reform, something that's being done across the country that would call on the Ontario Energy Board to apply a weekly ceiling, as it currently does, the same way it does today, with natural gas and electricity.

I heard one of the members speak about the fact that they wouldn't want the OEB to be the regulatory body, but they do want the federal government to provide some oversight.

I'll tell you something: The federal Competition Bureau has absolutely no legislative teeth to call on the oil and gas companies to provide any rationale for their prices—not one iota of power. They have no strength whatsoever to call on Exxon and BP.

Let's talk about BP's massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Guess what happened to their stock prices? They exploded through the roof after they devastated the environment in the Gulf.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: They're doing okay.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: They're doing all right, while consumers in this province continue to pay more and continue to get gouged at the pump.

Here is what we are proposing to the viewers watching and tuning in today. We are proposing a weekly gas cap. So, on Monday morning, when you wake up, let's say it's \$1.27 a litre, as it is today in Windsor—for the rest of the week, whether you're a soccer mom or a hockey dad or a grandparent who carools with their grandkids to take them to various classes, music courses, whatever you're doing, you know the price of gas throughout the week. Here's the beautiful thing: If the price goes down, if the price goes to \$1.24, then we'll take it there, but it cannot rise above that set ceiling on Monday morning.

You're going to vote against that. I'll tell you, I am looking forward to going back to my riding and letting the members of my community know that you guys are going to vote against one simple amount of fairness, something that has never been done because no one has the guts to do it.

Are you scared? Can you not stand up against the oil and gas companies? Here we are, the New Democrats; we're ready to do that.

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: The member across the way said, "Should we regulate beer and milk?" We already do regulate beer and milk, so why not regulate another fundamental aspect of our economy, gas prices, so that consumers are protected?

I am so proud to stand as a New Democrat today to protect the consumers of the province—something that is probably one of the most contentious issues in our ridings, the price of gas, the volatility.

This long weekend, we know—I'll buy your next tank of gas if it doesn't go up next weekend, Mr. Zimmer. I will. If it doesn't go up, I'll buy your next tank of gas.

I would ask you to consider this modest amount of consumer protection to ensure that the people in our ridings aren't getting ripped off at the pump. Come on, you can do this. You can have the guts to do it. I know the member opposite does have the guts to do it.

Here's something that really escapes the fundamental model of supply and demand when it comes to gas prices. We know they're regulated by the oil-producing nations of the world. It's not supply and demand with the gas prices across the world. It doesn't matter if supply is high and demand is low, or demand is high and supply is low, or they're both equal. It's an economic model of greed that only benefits the massive oil and gas companies.

Who gets ripped off at the end of the day? It's the moms and dads in our ridings. You guys should be ashamed. You have the ability today to stand up and protect them with this modest proposal. Cap gas prices, give people the certainty at the beginning of the week that they can afford to pay the price to get to work or to go about their business on a day-to-day basis.

You can do it, but you've got to have the guts to do it. Today will show your merit in this House. Will you have the will to actually provide some protection for consumers in this province or won't you?

You, too, on the opposite sides, you can do it, too. I'll tell you, the Conservative members, I always appreciated your sincerity, but I always thought you would stand up for consumers, consumer protection. You've got an opportunity to do that here today. Cap the price at the pump. On Monday morning when we wake up, we'll know what it's going to be. If the price goes down, we'll take it, but we're not going to allow it to go up and we're not going to allow people to get ripped off at the pumps.

Madam Speaker, I really appreciate your time, and I appreciate the viewers tuning in today. I expect that if this bill gets voted down, the members opposite and the

official opposition will be absolutely bombarded with letters asking them why they did not support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Oak Ridges–Markham.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Certainly, it has been a very interesting debate this afternoon on the opposition day motion brought forward by the leader of the third party. I listened intently to what she had to say. She certainly conveyed the sense that she was very concerned about affordability for consumers, certainly something that we share on this side of the House. However, in bringing forward this motion, which is superficially attractive, which may have some popular appeal, I think the member for Essex will find that sometimes when things are very simple, that is only on the surface.

1730

In fact, this is really a very complex matter. I would suggest that this opposition day motion is a very simplistic approach to a complex problem, because what we know from looking across this country where there is regulation of gas prices, in the five eastern provinces, that in fact it doesn't work. As my colleague from Richmond Hill has shown, as well as my colleague from Willowdale, prices are higher in those provinces.

Prices do vary in terms of some tax differences, but the vast majority of that variation relates to day-to-day fluctuations that we here in Ontario do take advantage of. Studies have shown—the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies published a report back in February 2009. They estimated gasoline price regulation cost the Atlantic provinces some 1 to 1.5 cents per litre. That had also been previously looked at in March 2007. A study prepared by Gardner Pinfold Consulting Economists estimated that regulation in Nova Scotia increased gasoline prices by 0.8 cents per litre.

The problem with this approach is that it simply does not work. Regulated prices will not allow consumers to immediately benefit from overnight drops in wholesale gas prices.

I think it's important to again talk a little bit about how gas prices are determined. We have—let's be frank about it—no control over world oil supplies or prices. Crude oil and fuel prices in North America are highly influenced by world oil markets. International politics plays a very large part and, literally, world oil prices can fluctuate on a daily basis.

We also have heard from my colleague from Peterborough about the federal government's responsibility for ensuring competition in gasoline markets. The Competition Bureau is an arm of Industry Canada and it administers the Competition Act, which, among other things, bans predatory pricing, collusion and abuse of dominant position. We know they've been successful, in fact, with a major prosecution. A number of independent gasoline marketers were convicted for price-fixing in Kingston and Brockville. So the feds are doing what they can in that regard.

Getting back to this issue of affordability that the leader of the third party talked about, we are very con-

scious on this side of the House of the need to ensure that all Ontarians can continue to budget and look after their daily affairs in a reasonable fashion. This is why we have taken so many measures over the past number of years to make life more affordable for Ontario families. People, I'm sure, will remember our tax reform package, cutting income taxes for 93% of Ontario taxpayers, saving the average family about \$355; the Ontario clean energy benefit, reducing electricity costs by 10% for families, farmers, seniors and small businesses; and we brought in up to \$1,025 in annual tax relief for seniors through the Ontario energy and property tax credit. We've been doing a lot in that regard.

Of course, we'd like to do more. We have the home renovation tax credit for seniors, unfortunately being held up because of bell-ringing; our Landlord and Tenant Act, where we're going to regulate rent increases—something else that is being held up. All these efforts are clearly to make life more affordable for Ontario families.

The leader of the third party also talked a little bit about having to use your car. In York region, traditionally a very suburban area, I must commend the regional government for the strides they've made in terms of York Region Transit and Viva. In fact, the town of Markham has established a really remarkable network of bike trails and hiking trails so people can actually access their convenience store on foot or by bike.

There are alternatives. We need to be mindful. We would be far better putting our efforts into solutions like that than this simplistic approach to a complex problem.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments? Further debate?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I just want to take you on a ride through my riding. It's quite a vast riding, quite large—just finished doing a search. Just to give you an idea, you start through the southern part of the riding, which would be in Killarney, Nairn Centre, Espanola; you'd have your Manitoulin Island. Work your way towards the north end towards Chapleau, Wawa and my furthest end, which would be Manitouwadge and Homepayne. There's a 14-cent difference in between, travelling in Algoma–Manitoulin.

Just to give you an example, in Espanola, the gas is selling at \$1.307. In Elliot Lake, it's at \$1.349. Then you go into Mindemoya, which is on Manitoulin Island, the central part of Manitoulin Island; it's sitting at \$1.389. Then let's head up towards Wawa, which is the northern part of the riding—which is normally where a lot of the people leave from the southern part of the riding to go enjoy some of the lakes, the benefits, the travel, the scenery that you have there. Once you get into Wawa, you get hit with \$1.439. Then let's take it a little bit further. You get into White River—there's excellent fishing up there. You've got to come up to White River. There is great pickerel fishing up there, but I won't tell that—

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Oh, yeah, it's just great fishing.

But for somebody who's going up there, guess what? You're going to be surprised with \$1,479. Then at the furthest tip into Manitouwadge, which is close to—as the crow flies away from Hornepayne, it lowers itself at \$1.39.

The point that I'm trying to make here is that just in my riding, you're looking at anywhere between 12 to 14 cents' difference, which is very difficult for some of these communities to survive and to even attract individuals to come to their community to benefit from the scenery they have there.

The one member a while ago said that we're looking for headlines. This happens every weekend. These are the prices that we are here with today, today being—oh, jeez—the 15th. Well, you know what's going to happen on Friday morning? I will love to come back and give you an update on these prices, because they're going to go up.

I enjoyed hearing what my colleague from Essex here had indicated in his speech. If you're tuning in late, you've got to tune in to what the member said. He just eloquently explained as far as this is a very small step which is a big step for people back home, as far as what we're trying to accomplish here.

With that, I'll leave it with others to speak. But I hope you enjoyed your trip through Algoma-Manitoulin because it's going to be a costly one for you if we don't do something about these gas prices.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I want to speculate on how the vote might come out on today's opposition resolution. I was surprised the other day when there was a motion before the House to, in effect—you may not agree with me—gut the Endangered Species Act. The member for Haliburton brought that motion. I thought—well, I'm thinking today, “Will those two parties vote together or not?” Then I saw the NDP and I said, “Don't worry, because I know Ruth Grier was a strong environmentalist, and Bud Wildman.” I said, “Don't worry. The NDP will stand up for the endangered species of this province”—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. I'd ask the member to restrict his comments to the opposition motion for today.

Hon. James J. Bradley: As with gas, Madam Speaker, I'm wondering how the vote is going to go, because most of the NDP caucus on that occasion—who knows what will happen today—voted with the Conservatives to gut the Endangered Species Act. I won't tell anybody in the environmental movement until next week about this. There's a shock out there. So when I look today, I'm speculating. Will the Conservatives and the NDP, on a matter of this kind, be on the same side again? I just cannot speculate on that.

1740

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You digress.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I know, I digress. I understand that.

I used to think that this was controllable. But I remember every Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, as it was called then, or energy, no matter what party, had the same page in the book. I'd always say, “Go to page 46,” and the answer would be, “We are now looking at the price of gas, and it's a federal responsibility.” That same book went through the Conservatives, it went through the NDP, it went through the Liberals.

Actually, one Conservative gave an honest answer one day. He was a very nice man, Mr. Saunderson. I had to go over to him because he was really in trouble for doing it and say, “That's not the answer that's in the book. I know it's the real answer, but it's not the answer in the book.” He was talking about how it's really very challenging to be able to deal with gas prices. Largely, they're controlled by speculators in New York City, who probably support the Conservatives somehow.

You know how they're talking about the environmentalists getting money from offshore? I have a suspicion that the anti-environmentalists get the same kind of money.

I just hope this vote doesn't go the same way as the endangered species vote, where the NDP and the Conservatives voted to gut the—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Beaches-Woodbine.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I listened intently to the minister who just spoke, and I want to assure him, I don't think there was anyone in the NDP who was voting to gut the Endangered Species Act. Certainly our caucus was, I admit, divided on a private member's bill.

In any event, I want to get back to this motion. This is a pretty simple motion. It calls for a one-week cap. It isn't going to cap it for all time. It's going to cap it every week so that people know during the week, “Do I rush out to fill up tonight? Do I get in a long, long lineup?”

What happens now is that when I'm driving home, the radio comes on and says, “You better gas up your car tonight, because at midnight it's going up four cents a litre,” and I see all the people lined up in a panic to save two bucks on a 50-litre fill-up. I see this. People know that it's going to happen, but they don't know why. They don't know why because world markets don't fluctuate that much.

Look at the world markets. Every time there is a crisis, the cost of a barrel of oil goes up. It spikes. I remember in my lifetime all the big spikes. The OPEC oil crisis was the first one, and then you had the Gulf War, and then you had Hurricane Katrina, and every single time the price of a barrel of oil spiked because it was more difficult to obtain that oil. But even in all of those spikes, we never paid \$1.32 a litre. Today the cost of a barrel of oil in Canada for West Texas crude is \$97, or perhaps even today \$96 a barrel. Oil has spiked as high as \$140 a barrel, and we did not pay \$1.32 at that time.

So you have to understand, it's not the cost of the barrel of oil; it is the cost of many things—perhaps

refinery; perhaps the hated HST, which added 8%. You have to know that that happened too. You have to know that that's part of the cost.

It's also because the oil companies are filthy, filthy rich. They make more money in this country than the banks. You have to know that that's true. And you have to know that we need, as consumers, protection from people who have a virtual monopoly on the cost of crude. There are only the five big sisters. That's all it is. That's what they're called: the five big sisters. They're all foreign-dominated, foreign-owned. One of the members asked earlier—it's all owned by hedge funds and groups of retirement funds. It's all foreign-owned. None of it is controlled in Canada. The last oil company that was controlled, Petro-Canada, was sold off. It's now foreign-owned too, and all the money flows out of Canada. Even though the oil is ours, the refinery and everything that goes with it flows out of the country, and the only people getting ripped off are consumers.

I also have to think about how many times—and I've been here now 11 years—people in this Legislature stood up and tried to do something about it. I remember when the member from York West, Mario Sergio, had a couple of bills on this very thing, trying to stop gouging. He still sits here as a Liberal, and I'm sure he's going to vote against this today or at least absent himself when the vote comes.

I remember when the member from Eglinton—Lawrence, Michael Colle, introduced two or three bills on this identical topic when he was in opposition. I remember when he did that and how strongly he felt about price gouging and how strongly he felt about protecting consumers.

I remember the former member from Barrie, Conservative Joe Tascona, who stood in this place. He was really quite brilliant, and he really wanted to talk a lot—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The gas-buster.

Mr. Michael Prue: The gas-busters. He talked a lot about that. He was a Conservative, and he wanted desperately to do something.

I remember when Jim Brown was here and all of the things that Jim Brown talked about: protecting the consumers and doing something about the multinational companies ripping off consumers.

Last but not least—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order.

Member, continue.

Mr. Michael Prue: Last but not least, I remember when the current Minister of the Environment, when he was in opposition, talking about gas prices and putting in his own bill to control and to help consumers.

I was here. I've been here 11 years. These are the five that come to my mind. I could have researched and found more because there have been any number of people standing up in this House when they are in opposition, and nobody's standing up, when they're in government, to protect the consumer. That is the absolute reality.

All this bill does is try to protect the little guy who has to fill up his tank if he drives a taxi, who has to drive around the city or some city every day on a tank of gas. That person needs to be protected. We need to protect ordinary people who drive their kids to and from school and who go shopping. We need to protect salespeople who need their car to go from place to place to earn their living. We need to protect the truckers. We need to protect the people who drive buses, all of those who earn their living in transportation, by saying, "At the start of the week, you know the cost, and while you're going around during that week, we guarantee you it cannot go above that line."

This is all this says. The consumer needs some protection. We are not trying to protect the consumer against the world price per barrel of oil. That does not need to happen. That's set on about a weekly basis or so. It goes up or down a little every day, but that is not the key cost. The key cost is the profits being made by the five sisters.

The point has already been made about regional variances. My friend from Willowdale talked a little bit about that and wanted to have a price on underwear or something. I don't understand what he was trying to say.

I will tell you, as you travel around this province, if you travel around a lot, you'll know that there are places to buy gas and places not to buy it.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Peterborough.

Mr. Michael Prue: Peterborough's cheap. Belleville's cheap. Kingston's cheap. Windsor's pretty cheap. I'll tell you, when I—

Ms. Cindy Forster: Dunnville's cheap.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yeah, Dunnville's cheap. But there are places that aren't cheap, and I'll tell you, most of those are in isolated places and in the north. If we can sell beer and we can sell alcohol for the same price in Toronto as we sell it in Moosonee, then there is no reason that people who live in more isolated places can't pay the exact same price as we pay here in Toronto or we pay in—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further debate?

Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day motion number 5. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1750 to 1800.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day motion number 5.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time.

Yates

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Horwath, Andrea	Schein, Jonah
Bisson, Gilles	Mantha, Michael	Singh, Jagmeet
Campbell, Sarah	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter
Craitor, Kim	Miller, Paul	Taylor, Monique

DiNovo, Cheri
Forster, Cindy

Natyshak, Taras
Prue, Michael

Vanthof, John

Crack, Grant
Dameria, Dipika
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Elliott, Christine

MacLeod, Lisa
Mangat, Amrit
McDonell, Jim
McKenna, Jane
McMeekin, Ted
McNaughton, Monte
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine

Takhar, Harinder S.
Thompson, Lisa M.
Wilson, Jim
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Yakabuski, John
Zimmer, David

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Those opposed will please rise.

Nays

Albanese, Laura
Amott, Ted
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Best, Margaret
Bradley, James J.
Cansfield, Donna H.
Chan, Michael
Chiarelli, Bob
Chudleigh, Ted
Clark, Steve
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael

Fedeli, Victor
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hardeman, Ernie
Hoskins, Eric
Jackson, Rod
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Jones, Sylvia
Kwinter, Monte
Leal, Jeff
Leone, Rob
MacCharles, Tracy
MacLaren, Jack

Milligan, Rob E.
Milloy, John
Moridi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.
Naqvi, Yasir
Nicholls, Rick
O'Toole, John
Oraziatti, David
Pettapiece, Randy
Piruzza, Teresa
Sandals, Liz
Scott, Laurie
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Todd
Sousa, Charles

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
The ayes are 17; the nays are 68.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): This house stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1804.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York–Sud–Weston	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
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Government
Publications

No. 54

N° 54

ISSN 1180-2987

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 40th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**



**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 16 May 2012

Mercredi 16 mai 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
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Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 16 May 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 16 mai 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES AMENDMENT ACT (RENT INCREASE GUIDELINE), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA LOCATION À USAGE D'HABITATION (TAUX LÉGAL D'AUGMENTATION DES LOYERS)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 9, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 19, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of the rent increase guideline / Projet de loi 19, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation en ce qui concerne le taux légal d'augmentation des loyers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak this morning on Bill 19, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of the rent increase guideline.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Say something nice, Laurie.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I don't know if I can.

Over 1.3 million Ontario families live in rental accommodation of one kind or another, which is quite a large number. Many of these tenant households are struggling to meet their household bills, and I don't think there's a member of the Legislature that hasn't got calls in their constituency office about the struggles that their constituents are having. One in five of these households is paying more than 50% of their income on rent, leaving barely enough for sustainability.

The guideline that people used to be told was that your housing cost should not be more than 25% of your monthly income. I remember when I sold real estate in one of the many jobs that I had before entering the Legislature, when I was helping people qualify and they were looking at houses, that was kind of a guide: 25%, 30% of your monthly income for your housing. Unfortunately, in Ontario that no longer reflects reality. In addition to the difficulties which half of these households are having in

paying their bills, nearly one third of them are living in accommodation that fails to meet the basic standards of adequacy, suitability and, of course, affordability, as I mentioned.

Some 142,000 Ontarians are currently on the waiting list for affordable housing units, and that list is growing. I know it's certainly a large, long list in the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. With the price of hydro, how could they afford to stay in their houses? This bill does nothing to address any of this, and these are really serious issues. But this bill does not address it.

I think since the government was first elected in 2003 we've seen a staggering array of tax increases which have deeply affected all Ontarians. It has just been compounded and compounded and compounded. We all remember that within a few months of its election in 2003, the government broke its first promise of "I will not raise your taxes" by introducing the health levy, which turned out to be the largest single tax grab in Ontario's history.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Wasn't that a scandalous thing?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes. The imposition of the HST at a time when the Ontario economy was so fragile—people were already struggling and suffering. They introduced the HST when people could least afford it. As my colleague from Leeds-Grenville so aptly pointed out in his remarks on March 28 when he addressed Bill 19, there was a time, not so many years ago, when rent geared to income or some other forms of affordable housing were considered temporary measures until a family got back on its feet. Now it can take families many years to even hope to improve their residential standard of living, and more and more of them are losing hope that they can.

Under this Premier and this government, Ontario has become unaffordable to an ever-increasing number of our citizens. We have hundreds of thousands of people who are unemployed, while the HST increased fees, and soaring hydro rates have eaten away at what little disposable income is left. I hear it every day in my riding. A frightening number of these families are living paycheque to paycheque, and I certainly know that money left at the end of the month is a dream for them. The reality, for more and more people, is that money left at the end of the month is not a dream that they can realize.

My food banks are overwhelmed. In January I was up to Haliburton, to the FoodNet up there, which is a great group of people—Barbara Davis with FoodNet, Rosie Kadwell from the Haliburton health unit; the United Church in Haliburton, who have a food kitchen. They give me updates every once in a while, and they almost cry on the phone, they're so overwhelmed. There are so

many people they need to help, and they just can't meet it.

This current legislation, Bill 19, limits annual rent increases in accordance with a guideline which is linked to the consumer price index for Ontario as reported by Statistics Canada. The bill would amend that to provide a guideline that rent increases would not be less than 1% and not more than 2.5%. We ask, why did the government feel it was necessary to amend that formula? Over the past 10 years, the average rent increase in Ontario was 2.1%. Over the last five years, the average rent increase has been just 1.8%. Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the current formula has been working just fine. The government obviously reacted to this year's increase of 3.1%. However, last year, the increases were 0.7%, for a two-year average of 1.9%, well within the range of the current legislation that we're discussing here today.

There is no question that parts of the Residential Tenancies Act are broken and are in desperate need of attention. However, the government has chosen to go after low-hanging fruit and focus its attention on a part of the act which is easy to deal with but has been working fine and doesn't need the attention. As I've said before in this House, this government has mastered the art of illusion, projecting an aura of activity. There's an aura of activity where there is no substance. The Liberal side wanted me to say a compliment, so I congratulate them on being masters of illusion on actually doing something for the people of the province of Ontario.

This government brings in a bill like this, trying to present it as a boon to Ontario's tenants. I don't see them jumping up and down outside, saying, "Yes, pass this bill." It doesn't seem to be happening out there. But the McGuinty government certainly has no reservation about wiping out over 60,000 jobs that are dependent on a healthy horse racing industry. They don't seem to care that those people are going to be unemployed, that they can't pay their mortgages, can't find a place to rent, let alone pay the rent if they do find one.

You have no reservations, in the Liberal government, about perpetuating the disastrous green energy experiments that have driven up our hydro rates to an insane level—and I say that, an insane level—forcing people out of work, out of their homes, looking for affordable housing which isn't available. It has no reservation about ignoring our appeal on this side, the PC Party appeal, to modernize the apprenticeship system, bringing it in line with other provinces in order to generate thousands of new skilled jobs that are actually needed. They could make changes, because our young people want to get into skilled trades, but they're not making that easy, for sure.

It has no reservation about its relentless pursuit to have a \$30-billion deficit and a \$411-billion debt on the backs of hard-working Ontario families of today and tomorrow—and it goes on for more than a generation, which is very sad. And it has no reservation about its blatant lack of oversight that led to the appalling and disgraceful goings-on at Ornge, and its continued refusal to accept responsibility or permit a full investigation and accounting of this scandal.

This government fritters away billions of dollars on various boondoggles, and who picks up the tab? Who does pick up the tab? I think we all know the answer to who picks up the tab: It's the generous people of Ontario. The buck always stops there. We have millions of them living in rental accommodations that are inadequate or that they simply cannot afford, and this bill, Bill 19, does nothing to address those problems. It's a vicious cycle, and it has been created by this very government that now wants to present, again, this window dressing of a bill to prove that it's actually doing something.

0910

I don't think you can fool the people of the province of Ontario much further. This bill does absolutely nothing to make rent more affordable. It will do nothing to shorten the waiting lists for affordable housing. It does nothing to alleviate the pain that Ontarians are experiencing from the weight of the financial burden this government has placed on their shoulders. It does nothing to stimulate jobs so that the people who are forced to live in or at least seek affordable housing can hope to better the lives of themselves and their families. The bill does nothing to alleviate the distress caused to so many of our citizens who are forced to choose between paying their heating bill and putting food on the table.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Attorney General.

Ms. Laurie Scott: People in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock—they're hurt. Whether it's the high unemployment rate, which is higher than the provincial average; the lack of doctors in their communities; inadequate transportation infrastructure, which stifles investment; the threat to the horse racing industry and its multitude of spinoffs and jobs that they're going to lose; or the unacceptable child poverty levels in Haliburton county, none of this will be eradicated by passing Bill 19.

As my colleague from Sarnia-Lambton said the other day in his remarks, "There's such thin gruel in this bill, I couldn't even find anything to talk about." I really couldn't agree more, Mr. Speaker. The present government has put their head in the sand—it seems deeper every day—ignoring what hard-working Ontarians are saying out there. They can no longer afford to live in their houses. They literally are leaving their houses in my riding because they can't afford to pay the bills. So when a piece of legislation like Bill 19 comes up, it's not helping them at all.

Mr. Speaker, you can gather that I'm not going to be supporting Bill 19. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I agree with a lot of things that the Conservative member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock says. In fact, many are saying the same thing, God bless. What does she say? She says rents are very high, which is true. All the three million people who live in rental accommodation earn a third of those who own homes, which suggests there's an income problem.

Wages are very low—at least for those who live in rental accommodation—and the list of people who are waiting to try to get into affordable accommodation is 152,000 long and getting longer every year. I agree with the member from Haliburton that the HST has added an additional burden on that whole income-level category of people who are facing a very difficult time, particularly in an economy where wages are very low.

I agree with her as well that the cap on rent is simply not going to do anything for anyone, because there's still vacancy decontrol, which allows the landlord to increase the rent as soon as somebody moves out—the Conservatives don't speak to that point—and it still allows the landlord to apply for above-guideline increases, which means that they will still get the money they're looking for, and the Conservatives don't speak to that. There's no new housing stock, which is equally true—the Liberals have been quite bad on this front—and the bill doesn't tackle that.

But here's where I have difficulty with the Conservatives. Their solution to all the problems we face is privatizing our hydro agenda, which will increase prices as opposed to decreasing them, and reducing corporate taxes, which is not going to help us at all.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mario Sergio: I've been listening to the remarks by the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. Let me say, Speaker, that you weren't here, but I was here. The member wasn't here and I was sitting in her place, and I could see Minister Leach on this side here. The day after they came into power, they stopped every building, every construction. Therefore, under their government not one unit of affordable housing was provided.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The Liberals are better.

Mr. Mario Sergio: My friend Rosario Marchese from Trinity-Spadina—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member knows that we don't use names; we use ridings. He almost got it right. Secondly, we don't have cross-dialogue. You go through me, okay? Thank you.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Thank you, Speaker. Trinity-Spadina—is that the right—

Interjection.

Mr. Mario Sergio: It is?

Interjection.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Yes, absolutely.

We have a special relation with my colleague from Trinity-Spadina, Speaker—through you—and I have to say that their record doesn't even come close to the record of the Conservatives when they were in government. Let me say that if it wasn't for our government, a lot of people would be without reasonable accommodations. We have done a lot.

The reason why we have this particular bill at this time is to give tenants in the province of Ontario peace of mind, so they know now that for four years, they know what their rent increase is going to be. We don't leave

them stranded like you did. Therefore, now they can look at things other than concentrating on paying their rent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I appreciate the comments from my colleague from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. She always delivers a reasoned and thoughtful address here in the Legislature.

I'm a little more concerned about the comments from my friend from York West. He likes to talk about other people's records. He doesn't like to talk about the Liberal record. Well, in that Conservative government, 1.088 million net new jobs were created in that eight-year term of office.

Yes, this bill establishes a floor and it establishes a ceiling for rent increases in the province of Ontario. Whoop-de-do, because people will know that the rent increase won't exceed 2.5%, I believe it was. However, that's not what they're concerned about. They're concerned about 150% increases in their hydro under this government. They're concerned about the bevy of new taxes that have been foisted upon them by the decisions of this government. Oh, wonderful, the rent increase won't exceed 2.5%. What about the millions of seniors who happen to live in their own home, I say to the member from York West, who own their homes but can't even afford the property taxes because when they pay for their hydro and they pay the other taxes that you've put on them—rent increases are immaterial to them.

Whether this bill is passed or not, we still have legislation in place, and by regulation, the government can set the rent increases based on the CPI in the province of Ontario. So they're going up and down, like this is the best thing since the wheel, when in reality they're doing nothing to lessen the burden on struggling families in this province, and that's shameful.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jonah Schein: Good morning, Speaker. Good morning, folks. It feels like Wednesday breakfast club here in the Legislature. We've been debating this bill, Bill 19, for weeks now, it seems, and I feel fortunate to be one of the folks in Ontario who has a job, who had breakfast this morning. I'm really actually concerned that there are too many people who are going to work today without breakfast, going to school without breakfast, or in fact don't have jobs, don't have employment, and won't be eating this morning.

I would like to make sure that we get this bill into committee and bring in folks who are concerned about the high cost of rent, the high cost of their bills in this province, because we need desperately to have that debate. In fact, we need to have that debate with people who are actually struggling, with people who can't pay their rent each month, who can't feed their families every day. They need to be part of this conversation because all of us had breakfast this morning.

This bill does not go nearly far enough. The Metro federation of tenants says that in the last two years, this

bill would only have saved families \$3 per year, and that's simply not enough.

We need real legislation. We need things that do more than make people feel good in here. We need bills that make people feel good in Ontario, that put food in their stomachs. We've had wages frozen in this province, and now we have both sides of the House, the Liberals—the government—and the opposition talking about freezing wages, but we don't talk about freezing rents in this province.

Yesterday, our party brought forth a motion to cap gas prices each week, to provide a bit of reliability on the cost of gas, and both the government and the opposition voted against that. Ontario needs a government, it needs advocates in this House, that are going to make life more affordable for people in this province, and we can't get started soon enough. So I'm hoping that this debate will end soon, we'll send this to committee, and we'll bring people in to talk about this.

0920

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock has two minutes.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I want to thank the members from Trinity-Spadina, York West, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and Davenport, who responded to my comments.

The only reason that we're discussing this bill, as I mentioned earlier, which is Bill 19, is that the minister noticed the 3.1% increase in this year's rent. I mean, she said that's the only reason. The reason the ceiling and the floor have changed to 2.51% is because of this year's rent increase.

The members of the opposition have highlighted the fact that people are struggling in the province of Ontario. It does nothing to address the burdens that they're facing, which I have mentioned: the hydro rates, the HST, the health levy. They're being forced out of their houses because they don't have jobs for various reasons, mostly because of bad government legislation over there. It's ironic that this government has tried to portray itself as kind of the benevolent overseer of its subjects, who unfortunately are the taxpayers of Ontario, while at the same time it does everything in its power to make their lives more difficult and oppressive through this misguided and paternalistic approach to governing.

This bill, Bill 19, is window dressing, as I said. It is nothing more. It has no substance. It doesn't address any of the real problems associated with residential tenancy in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: They don't want to address the real problems.

Ms. Laurie Scott: "They do not want to address the real problems," my colleague from Northumberland said. It does not. You know, we have a responsibility to our constituents to address the real problems in the province of Ontario, and we stand up here in opposition and fight every day to make this government aware of them and to say, "Create some substantial legislation that is going to help people in the province of Ontario."

One person in my riding said to me, and I think it summed it up very well, that we are creating a poorer and a meaner province of Ontario under this Liberal government's leadership.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 19, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of the rent increase guideline.

I just want to point out, as has been pointed out by previous speakers, that in fact, really, this bill does very little except put a cap on any particular year based on the consumer price index. As you know, currently, the annual amount that a landlord can increase the rent is based on the consumer price index of Ontario, which is a measure of inflation, calculated by Statistics Canada. The consumer price index includes items like food, shelter and transportation. I want to point out that an important part of this is the shelter, and obviously the cost to people who have to pay for that shelter.

One of the problems that the McGuinty government is facing is that their policies have resulted in a rapidly increasing consumer price index. For 2011, the consumer price index was 3.1%, so as a result, landlords can increase the rent in 2012 by that same amount—and I think that's very important: why it went up so much that year. There are two ways that the government could have addressed the situation. They could have chosen to address the problem by looking at the cause of the consumer price index going up, or they could ignore the problem and just cap the increase, which, of course, Mr. Speaker, you know is what the government chose.

This bill doesn't solve the problem, it just creates a new one. The consumer price index isn't just a number; it is the percentage that the cost of living is increasing for the people across Ontario: for seniors on fixed incomes and young families who are struggling to make ends meet. These are the people who dread receiving their hydro bills in the mail. These are the people who had to decide what to give up when the government introduced the HST and eco fees and raised the cost of government fees like drivers' licences and other licence fees.

If you went to a tenant in Ontario and said, "I'm going to give you a choice. Option A is I'm going to drive up the cost of items you use every day, but I'll put a cap on your rent increase so at least the landlord can't pass their costs on to you. Or option B: As a government, we are going to look at the impact of our legislation before we pass it, to ensure that we aren't recklessly increasing prices for things you use every day, and driving jobs out of the province. That way, we will make sure that not only will your rent increase stay low, but we will stop the spiralling increases of hydro costs and the extra government taxes and fees." Mr. Speaker, let me tell you, the tenant would choose option B, lower costs, every time. So would the Progressive Conservative caucus. The Liberals, on the other hand, would clearly choose option A. They have shown that, by doubling provincial spending, by signing unrealistic contracts through FIT and micro-FIT, and by introducing the HST.

The calculations of the consumer price index include sales tax, because obviously taxation levels can have a significant impact on prices in the consumer index, when you add the 8%. This government's decision to introduce the HST resulted in provincial sales tax being applied to hundreds of items and services that had previously been exempt, items like electricity, home heating fuel, gasoline, newspaper advertising, haircuts, magazines, postage stamps, dry cleaning, snow removal and legal fees. It was an immediate 8% increase on the cost of hundreds of items. That's a huge impact on the consumer price index and the budgets of families across Ontario.

Just over a year ago, the McGuinty government released the fact that hydro rates are forecast to increase by 46% over the next five years—46%, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the most recent increase went into effect on May 1. That's a huge cost for the consumers of Ontario. It is a huge cost for seniors on fixed incomes, and for families. It's also a significant impact on the consumer price index.

Statistics Canada breaks down the consumer price index in a number of ways, including calculating it without taking into account energy costs. Last year, the rate in Ontario would have only been 2%. That means more than one third of the increased cost of living in our province last year was due to the increased cost of energy. The government wants to cap rent increases at 2.5%. If it wasn't for the increase in energy costs, the consumer price index would have been well below that 2.5%.

Government documents are quite clear that the majority of the increase in hydro rates is due to green energy projects. Taxpayers understand that you can't sign contracts to buy energy for 80 cents, or even 40 or 50 cents, a kilowatt hour without driving up the cost of hydro for everyone and, as a result, driving up the cost of living.

It's clear there is no real plan for energy, Mr. Speaker. We saw that with the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants that the government insisted had to be placed in those locations, only to cancel them later for political reasons, at huge expense. Think of what we could have done with that money: the hospitals we could have built, the schools; the debt we could have paid down. Instead, it cost taxpayers billions of dollars and resulted in lawsuits against the government.

The increasing costs don't just impact consumers; they also impact businesses and landlords. The government is creating problems for landlords that will eventually impact the tenants. The government is increasing costs for landlords, then telling them they aren't allowed to increase the rent to cover the costs, and instead they just have to accept it as a loss. I think protecting the tenants is important, but the government is going about it in the wrong way. To keep rents lower, the government should be addressing the spiralling costs of operating and maintaining buildings, not putting arbitrary caps on increases.

A few weeks ago, I had an opportunity to speak to a landlord who operates a number of apartment dwelling units in Oxford. He said that if this bill is passed, he would be forced to increase rents by the maximum allowable every year, just to protect himself against the

years when cost increases are higher than the allowable rent increase. I don't think that's what the government intended with this legislation. We're also going to have landlords who can't afford to invest in upgrades or even perform proper maintenance on their buildings, because the costs are increasing faster than their rents. Again, I don't think that's what this government intended with this bill. If landlords are losing money, there is no incentive to invest in new buildings to ensure that we have sufficient rental properties available; eventually, that will lead to rent increases.

0930

I wonder whether the government side even tried to talk to landlords about solutions they could introduce in this bill. I worked with the Federation of Rental-housing Providers when I did my private member's bill, Mr. Speaker, and I found that they were a great source of information and very helpful in dealing how it would impact the people that were involved.

Mr. Speaker, this bill addresses the symptoms of the problem and not the cause. It's a little like taking your car to a mechanic because the engine is making a strange noise and he fixes it by modifying your radio so you can turn up the volume louder so you don't hear the noise. Well, we know, Mr. Speaker, if you don't deal with the problem in the engine, it will get worse; just making the sound go away will not fix it.

If the government doesn't address their policies that are putting extra costs on consumers and businesses, there are going to be consequences—like seniors who can no longer afford to stay in their homes, like parents who have to make a choice between buying themselves a winter coat or letting their kids play on a sports team, like businesses relocating to less expensive jurisdictions and taking their jobs with them. The McGuinty government needs to be honest about the impact that their legislation is having on the people of Ontario. It isn't enough to have a piece of legislation, a great-sounding name and have a couple of photo opportunities. The government needs a real plan to get this province back on track. They need well-researched and thought-out policies that will encourage economic growth and jobs. They need to take real steps to fix the financial problems facing this province.

Yet this government seems to be doing the opposite. They introduced a budget that actually increases spending. They don't have a jobs plan, and they aren't addressing the problems, like the increasing cost of hydro, that are driving businesses out of the province. They need to stop treating taxpayers and Ontario businesses like bottomless piggy banks. Whether it's increased taxes, new fees or driving up the cost of essentials like hydro, it all comes from the same place, the same taxpayers who are going to be stuck with the fiscal mess this government is creating, and simply capping rent increases isn't going to fix the problem. I think that we need to be much more involved in making sure that the impact of the legislation is acceptable in dealing with the cost. I want to point out that when the cost of living goes up more

than 2.5%, the cost to run the establishment goes up more than 2.5%. What are the landlords going to do to deal with that?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's my pleasure rising this morning, as I did in the past, to talk about G19, the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act. I talked a little while ago about the fabulous young lady from here in the Toronto area—her name was Claire—and the challenges that she faced as a single mother with the concerns with rent, and the challenges that she faced as a single mother not only to find affordable rent, but actually find good care for her child.

But let's put this into perspective as far as what this bill will do. Basically, this bill puts a small dent into—it's a good initiative. It will help some, but it will definitely not help the masses, and that's something that I've said repeatedly on many of the government's bills that have come forward through this Legislature.

We really need to look at improving affordable rents for all of our tenants and protecting their rights. This is something that is essentially missing, but let's just put this into context. How many individuals are affected by it? Over 1.3 million tenant households in Ontario and 125,000 residents living in housing co-ops, accounting for almost one third of the province's population. That's a huge number. When you're actually looking at this bill and what it actually is going to do, for an individual paying \$1,000 a month in rent, we're looking at a \$3 savings at the end of the year.

If we're going to do something, do something serious. Put some teeth in this bill. Really look at some of the proposals that have been coming from across the way. Look at maybe eliminating the HST and how much that is going to be saving. Look at what we proposed yesterday in regard to capping gas prices. That is an immediate savings for these individuals that would help them. Please, I urge this government, put some teeth into what you're proposing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: It is my pleasure to speak today in support of Bill 19, the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act (Rent Increase Guideline), 2012.

Our government has consistently shown a strong commitment to protecting tenants across Ontario. We've proved that commitment with our Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, which was established to provide strong rent regulations and to keep rent affordable for tenants. We've afforded tenants across Ontario the lowest year-over-over increase of any government in recent memory, at 1.9% on average. Last year's guideline increase was 0.7%, the lowest on record.

The legislation, as written, worked well in the pre-recession period. However, it no longer reflects the current economic circumstances for those who rent, and that's why our government is stepping in to address that. We believe we have to revisit the legislation so that

future increases are in line with what's happening in the real world for tenants in Ontario. That's why we introduced Bill 19. If passed, Bill 19 would ensure that the annual rent increase guideline would be capped at 2.5% and would not fall below 1%.

I must say, in my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East, this is becoming increasingly important. It's a riding that didn't have a lot of apartments and condos, but that's changing. We have a new development called San Francisco by the Bay on the Frenchman's Bay harbour. So this is becoming increasingly important to folks in my riding and in Durham region.

The proposed changes, if passed, will provide stability and affordability for renters during these uncertain economic times, while continuing to recognize that moderate rent increases allow landlords to maintain their rental properties.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this very important bill today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I stand today in total support of my colleague from Oxford and my colleague from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, because when you take a look at this bill and you think about the real world that was referenced earlier, the fact of the matter is, people in Ontario are drowning. They're sinking in water, and Bill 19 is nothing but a rock skimming the surface of the water. It isn't comprehensive; it does not go far enough. The fact of the matter is, people are getting their hydro shut off. People just can't afford to live any longer in Ontario as it stands today.

We need a government that's ready to take some bold steps, that's listening to the folks in Ontario and is prepared to do right by them. Doing right by them means making life more affordable; it means lowering the cost of heating their home, making sure life is affordable so that families can enjoy a quality of life that everyone deserves in Ontario.

We're in a sorry state of affairs. I thought it was very interesting to hear that a constituent from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock referred to this province as being meaner. We don't want that. Ontario used to be the economic engine of this wonderful nation, and we're spiraling here. As I said, people are drowning in debt. This province is drowning in debt. It's a sorry state when our government chooses just to skim across the surface.

We need to have policy. We need legislation that will take us in the direction of recovery. We need affordable living under a government that listens, consults and fully understands that we need a comprehensive approach that benefits all Ontarians, as opposed to picking winners and losers. This just doesn't go far enough, and I support my colleagues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jonah Schein: The United Nations has declared that all people have a right to decent and affordable housing, and that's a principle that our party, the NDP, stands

firmly behind. Canada has ratified this treaty, but the Liberals, in their recent housing strategy, voted down an amendment to make housing a human right, and that's hugely problematic. We have so far to go to create affordable housing here in Ontario.

I was talking to folks from ACORN this weekend. There's real concern about the growth in slum housing in Toronto and across Ontario. Too many landlords are getting away with delaying repairs. They're treating tenants unfairly. They're renting out units with bedbugs—and we need a bedbug solution here, but I don't hear any talk about bringing that forward.

0940

Interjection.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Yes. The Liberal government has absolutely failed to stand up to slum landlords in Ontario.

So we've got tens of thousands of Ontarians who are stuck in rundown and unaffordable apartments because they're waiting for years for affordable housing. During the election, we said we'd build 50,000 new affordable housing units over the next 10 years. The Liberals have promised and not come through with an affordable housing plan. We need to make rent more affordable in this province. We have one in five tenants who pay more than half of their income in rent, and this is why we see a huge growth in food bank use across this city and across this province.

Members here have mentioned it today, but bills keep on going up. The HST on people's home essentials, on their heating and electricity costs, is adding to their expenses. I feel like we have a government that's content to let everyday, regular, low-income and moderate-income people continue to pay extra for the bare basics to live.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Oxford has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to thank the members from Algoma-Manitoulin, Pickering-Scarborough East, Huron-Bruce and Davenport for their comments.

I think it's rather interesting that the comments are generally about the challenges we are facing in the rental market, shall we say, or rental accommodation in the province of Ontario, but that's not what this bill is about. As I mentioned in my original presentation, if it wasn't for the government's actions, this bill would not be needed because, in fact, the rent increase under the present legislation would have been less than the 2.5% that's being proposed in this bill if it hadn't been for the increased cost of the things that government controls. The challenge that I think we face is that that challenge, what the government is doing to the people of Ontario, is not restricted to people who rent accommodation; that same problem exists for the people who own their own homes. Their cost of energy goes up; their cost of heating oil and everything that they buy, their property taxes, are all going up at the same rate that the consumer price index is going up, and this bill does nothing for them, Mr. Speaker. It just does one small thing, which will have very little impact on anyone, because that's not where the prices are going as we speak. What we need is a government that stands up and looks after all the people.

Mr. Speaker, when I get calls in my constituency office from people who can't pay their hydro bills, it's just as likely to be a senior living in their own home as it is someone who is renting accommodation. The challenge is not the cap that's going on there; the challenge is what the government is doing in increasing the cost of living in this province for people who can't afford it. That's why I made that presentation based on that.

I don't object to putting that there. I don't think the 2.5% will have much impact. If you look over the past five years, there would be absolutely no impact. It's a PR bill, as opposed to a government action bill. That's what I think is wrong with this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join this debate this morning on Bill 19, because, as has been the habit of the government of late, they don't want to speak to their own legislation. Oh, they do what we call a "hit." For those out in TV land, that's when you have a two-minute question or comment on the speech of another member in the House. But they don't seem to want to speak to their own legislation, yet they're calling this a priority piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock earlier today referenced my colleague from Sarnia-Lambton, who described this as pretty thin gruel. Well, this is not a prop, because this is the actual bill. It's one sheet of paper. I'd have to fold this many times to level my chair, Mr. Speaker. There's not much to it, yet the government is calling this a priority piece of legislation.

Priority: They've got the first two letters right, as my colleague from Oxford referred to. Priority: the first two letters are "PR." This is a PR piece. It's not about rental increases. It's not about low-cost housing. It's not about tenants. It's not about landlords. It's another public relations exercise on the part of this government. Each and every time they bring in a new bill, particularly in this Parliament, it is designed by the politicians in the corner office. The message is sent down to the bureaucrats to write a bill that is going to knock off one more of the dominoes, as they say, one more check in the box, to say, "We've now done something to get this group of people on our side." That's what this is about, Mr. Speaker.

All this bill does is establish a floor and a ceiling. Rent increases cannot be less than 1%; rent increases cannot be more than 2.5%. Based on the rent increases of the last five years, the bill would be irrelevant. But one thing that it does do, and it does actually cause me some concern, is that it codifies this for the next four years.

I know that economists make a living forecasting what might happen in this province and any other jurisdiction over a longer period of time. Sometimes they're right; many times they're wrong. It isn't just in that, it's the forecasting business. The guy who's right sometimes gets his articles published in the Wall Street Journal. The guy who's wrong finds out that there's another career out

there other than as an economist. And even the ones who are wrong—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, if you're here, you're likely to become the finance minister. I thank my colleague from Northumberland-Quinte West for that witty insertion into my speech this morning. He's not far from the truth.

Speaker, what if, in year three, something happens in our economy and the inflation rate is 4%? Is anybody going to be building new housing if they're legislated at 2.5%? Is anybody going to feel that there is an incentive to fill the gap in the amount of housing that is required versus the amount of housing that is in the queue or that is in the roster that is available? At 2.5%, if the inflation rate exceeds that, there is no incentive. I don't think they've really considered that possibility. I'm not suggesting that the rate will be exceeding 2.5%, but it could. I don't have a crystal ball; I don't know what it's going to be like in three years.

Having said that, it's like they want to take this issue off the table for four years and hope that they don't have to deal with it. But I never heard from anybody in the province of Ontario clamouring to say, "You know what we need here? And I hope this is a priority of the government. We need a bill that sets the rental increase guidelines on a four-year basis, not an annual basis." Because we have a CPI that in fact is based on a year-to-year measurement, it would seem only practical and sensible that the rent increases would be determined on a year-by-year basis. But this government—it's hard for me to explain what goes on in the cerebral areas in that corner office there. I don't even want to risk going there, Speaker, because it's a bit like an old Vincent Price movie: It scares me at times. But there are those who may want to—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm dating myself a little bit, eh? Anyhow, it is what it is. They brought it forth and they consider this a huge priority.

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What scares me, Mr. Speaker, is what they don't consider a huge priority in this province, and that is the ability of a family, the ability of a small business, the ability of a widowed senior to get by in this province. Could they have put a little PR—and I don't mean public relations, but priority—on to that issue? Maybe that's where their priorities should be, because all we've seen from this government is a constant—just one issue after another, one bill after another, one regulation after another, for eight years, that have made it more expensive and, as a result, more difficult to live in the province of Ontario.

I just think of one of the first things they did when they got elected: They brought in—I think they called it the health premium. They called it the health premium and refused to consider that it was further taxation, but you know what? It went to court, and the court says, "You can call this whatever you want, but we're calling it

a tax. It's a health levy; it's a tax." You know, it's that age-old saying that I heard from my father on occasion, but it still rings true: "You can slice it and dice it in any way you want, but baloney is still baloney," and a tax is still a tax. You can call it what you want, you can give it a fancy name, you can try to make it sound easier, you can try to make it sound compassionate, you can try to make it sound soft, but at the end of the day, it's a tax. And there's one thing common about a tax: It means that when I put my hand in my pocket after the government has put their hand in it first, there's going to be less in it. There's going to be less in it than there would otherwise have been.

But we don't get to say very much, as a citizen in this province, about how that government spends those tax dollars, so let's see how they have spent it or how they're about to spend it. How about the legal challenges to the gas plants in Mississauga or Oakville? How much is that going to cost those people, and whether they do it through a taxation or whether it goes on to the hydro bills, the energy bills—and my good God, don't get me started there, Mr. Speaker. I've only got 42 seconds left. But can you just imagine how much of the hydro bill that people are paying in this province is as a result of mismanagement and misdirected policies of this government?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'd like to remind the member that he's drifting from Bill 19, and to get back to Bill 19, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: In the 16 seconds—I wish I had 19 seconds, because it would have matched the bill. Nineteen seconds is about all you would have needed for this bill, but I can do it in eight: What an unbelievable, thin piece of gruel, as my colleague from Sarnia-Lambton said.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: You know what? There is one good thing that I can agree with my colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke about: This is a feel-good bill. It makes you feel good. It gives you the headlines that are supposed to be out there. An esteemed colleague of mine, and a benchmate from Hamilton-Stoney Creek, referred to this as a feather bill, and that's exactly what it is. It's something that looks good.

Let's go through the bill. I'll go page by page. So Bill 19, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act—

Interjection: It's only one page; that's it.

Mr. Michael Mantha: So I'm done. So if this is the long-term plan that this government has in order to address affordable housing—I'm sorry, I don't mean to laugh about this, but it is almost laughable. If this is the long-term housing strategy that this government has—well, wait a second. I'll go through it again. Let me go through it again.

Okay, so there is no funding, there are no targets, and there are no timelines. There's really nothing in this bill. There's not a penny in it. If this is what's going to rescue us and stimulate jobs and give us the structure that we

need to really help communities and go through—wait a second. I'll go through it again.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Take your time.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Take my time? Okay.

Okay, let's stop this. Let's get this to where it needs to go. Unfortunately, in the entire one page of it, it's difficult to go back home and say, "This is really going to save you." We need some substance. Put some teeth behind your bills.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: This is a routine bill, and I believe that we all believe it's a necessary bill. Our government has consistently shown a strong commitment to protecting tenants across Ontario, and I believe we have proved that commitment by establishing strong rent regulations to keep rent affordable for tenants. We have afforded tenants across Ontario the lowest year-over-over increase of any government in recent history and in recent memory, at 1.9% on average. Last year's guideline was 0.7%, the lowest on record.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Wow, that's an accomplishment.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: That is. However, the legislation, as it was written, worked well in the pre-recession period; it no longer reflects the current economic circumstances for those who rent. We believe that we have to revisit the legislation so that future increases are in line with what's happening in the real world for tenants in Ontario.

That's why our government has introduced Bill 19. If passed, Bill 19 would ensure that the annual rent increase guideline would be capped at 2.5% and would not fall below 1%. The guideline would continue to be based on Ontario's consumer price index.

What does this mean? It means that in years when the current guideline formula results in a guideline below 1%, the guideline will be determined to be 1%. In the years where the current formula results in a guideline above 2.5%, the guideline will be determined to be 2.5%. This will give stability and affordability to renters and moderate rent increases to landlords. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's always a pleasure to join in the debate when my colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has provided this Legislature with a presentation. I think all members would agree that he adds a great deal to the debate whenever he discusses any topic in this chamber, and we certainly appreciate his efforts on Bill 19.

As my colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke stated, this bill is "thin gruel," to steal a line from our colleague from Sarnia-Lambton, Mr. Bailey. We expected that this government would take significant action on the economy so that we could actually ensure that there's affordable housing for everyone, because they could actually afford to live in a rental apartment or to own their own home.

There have been a lot of suggestions on how to improve this piece of legislation. My colleague from Toronto—what's your riding, Mr. Schein?

Mr. Jonah Schein: Davenport.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —from Davenport talked about a local issue that he is concerned with in his community, in his city of Toronto. In the city of Ottawa, I represent one of the fastest-growing communities in all of Canada, where home ownership is a very significant and important investment in one's life, yet at every step of the way, this Liberal government is making it much more difficult for people to either own their own home or rent a suitable living environment. That, my friends, is what is at stake here. This Liberal government, with their one-page Bill 19, certainly does not do that.

We are facing job losses each and every month here in Ontario. That should be the focus of that government. That should be the focus of how we help the people of this province. And that is why I stand with my colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jonah Schein: I was listening to the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and listening to him talk about who picks the pockets of folks in Ontario. I think we have a small—well, a rather large—disagreement about this. To him, it's government. I would hope that we would become a government, and that's not what we would do. But when I look around, I see people whose pockets are feeling light, who feel like they've been robbed, and they're being robbed by big oil companies. They're being robbed by insurance companies. They're being robbed on their hydro and electric bills.

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These are things that we're standing up, defending here, as the third party, to make life more affordable, and yet the other two parties here refuse to stand up for Ontarians. They like to call them taxpayers; I like to call them residents or citizens of this province. We need to make sure that we stand up and make renting an apartment not a luxury but a human right in this province.

Last year, we had a one-time commitment from the province to work on the bedbug strategy in Ontario. This is the kind of thing that we need. We cannot continue to have bills introduced that don't have a dollar of resource put behind them. So, when we talk about bullying in this House, there's not a dollar of support for a teacher or a social worker to support that bill. When we talk about rent control, there's not a dollar put towards fighting bedbugs. This is about people's health. This is about people's mental health. This is about the prosperity of Ontario, because nobody is going to want to come to this city in a few years if we allow bedbugs to run this province.

So I would like to see a housing discussion that included real resources to make sure that tenants and folks across the city and across this province have safe, affordable, decent housing. That's something that we haven't heard, and we need to hear some bills that have real substance behind them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has a two-minute reply.

Mr. John Yakubuski: I'd like to thank the members from Algoma-Manitoulin, York South-Weston, Nepean-Carleton and Davenport for their comments. Some of them spoke to what I said, and some really didn't.

But what I didn't have a chance to—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Is that unusual, John?

Mr. John Yakubuski: Not totally; totally not unusual, I say to my friend from Trinity-Spadina.

But let's talk about the non-rental population in this province, those who do own their own homes. Home ownership is something that most people aspire to. Particularly for those people who do not live in the downtown core of major cities, home ownership is something that they cherish. Some, of course, in the cities become homeowners in a condominium building.

But the homeowner in this province feels like they're under siege by the McGuinty Liberals. To my friend from Davenport who thinks that it's the private sector that picks the pockets of the residents of this province, it's the government that legislates what you pay them. You don't have a choice but to pay your levy to Caesar, as they say in the Bible.

It is the decisions of government that have made it so difficult and uncomfortable for those homeowners to live in this province, and particularly the decisions of this government. If you look at the government side of the cost of living, when you've taken your spending in this province from \$68 billion to \$126 billion in this term of office, you know you're taking an awful lot more money out of the pockets of those homeowners.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: A great pleasure to enter debate on Bill 19 today. I would respectfully submit that we change the short name of this bill to "Oops, I did it again."

This bill is a result of the Liberal acknowledgement that the HST has had a catastrophic effect on everyday Ontarians. Families, seniors, small businesses and, in this case, renters, people who live in downtown Ottawa, who live in downtown Toronto and who live elsewhere in rental units, have seen that it's become very difficult to manage their everyday budget, and it's become very difficult for landlords as well. So this bill is really an acknowledgment that the Liberals failed when they implemented the HST.

Let's just have a little history lesson on how we brought in the HST here. Well, I shouldn't say how "we" did; we fought it, Mr. Speaker. This Liberal government took about six weeks to bring in the single largest sales tax increase in Ontario's history. Let's talk about why they did that. They saw a greedy \$3-billion tax grab opportunity. They felt that it was within their right to look at Ontarians as an ATM—cha-ching, cha-ching—because they have a spending problem. What happened then was that they brought in the HST—they harmonized the provincial sales tax with the federal sales tax—and when every other single province in Confederation either brought in substantial changes to what would be covered

or brought in exemptions, these guys kept that on everything, including home heating.

They also decided to raise the tax increase. Where most provinces, when they harmonized, effectively decided to reduce a number of the costs that would be associated with the HST, this greedy government over here decided they were going to raise an extra two points. So they actually took in \$3 billion more than any government would have because of harmonization. It wasn't tax-neutral, it wasn't revenue-neutral, and it hit people. It hit, for example, landlords who had to deal with things like snow removal, landscaping, home improvement services—I'm talking about plumbing and electrical. All of those service sector arrangements then saw the HST come into play. That has then gone on to be passed on to consumers. This is simply an acknowledgement that they got it wrong with the HST and how they implemented simplifying the taxation process.

I actually believe, as a result—in the last election, we saw several Liberal cabinet ministers go down to defeat, and I would humbly suggest to you that many of those seats were lost as a result of how they implemented that greedy 13% HST tax grab without making it revenue-neutral. It had a significant impact on the people they represent. In this case, they have left landlords no option other than to raise the rent because of that snow removal, because of that plumbing and electrical work that needs to be done on top of that landscaping work. There needed to be someone to pay for that extra percentage as a result of the HST, so who better to pay it than to let it trickle down? What this government has done is forced landlords, and then of course their tenants, to pay for the additional costs as a result of the HST.

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that this is yet again an "Oops, I've done it again," because this is the first time that they've acknowledged that the HST has had a very negative impact on Ontario constituents, particularly as a result of the high HST rate, that 13%. They did it with home heating, remember? They brought in that 10% benefit. They said that was going to fix everything and it would just negate the HST.

Well, you know what? I think Ontarians are smart enough. They get their bill; they know that there is that 13% charge on their home heating. They know that on the debt retirement charge, they're paying HST. They know that this Liberal government is getting anywhere between \$3 billion and \$5 billion extra a year as a result of the harmonized sales tax. And there has been no relief anywhere else in the system. There have been no exemptions. Their rent is going up. Gas has gone up. For heaven's sake, funeral arrangements have gone up.

This is what this Liberal government has done, because, as my colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke stated earlier, this isn't the first tax that they increased. They brought in the single largest sales tax increase in Ontario's history with the HST, but they brought in the single largest income tax increase as well, and that was the health tax. They tried to tell people in this Legislature and in this province that it wasn't a tax,

as my colleague said. They pretended it was a so-called premium. These guys are the worst insurance salesmen in this province. No one believes them. Why would you buy insurance from them? You don't want to.

In fact, that's why people like Moody's and Standard and Poor's have put them on credit watch and put them on a downgrade, because this government can't manage people's money. And now they want to force us to pass their budget by June, so that they can prove to the world they have a plan. They haven't had a plan in nine years. All they see is every single soccer mom, grandmother and small business owner as their personal ATM, to spend more money and keep spending more money, and they have nothing to show for it—nothing—with the exception of a deficit and a ballooning debt.

Let's talk about that for a moment, Mr. Speaker, and how Bill 19 impacts that. We're looking at the trickle-down effect of the HST. It goes to the landlord, then it goes down to the tenant—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would ask the members on the government side, if they want to talk, to not yell to each other. You might want to go outside to talk about it or at least sit beside each other. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks, Speaker. You know what? I think it's an important history lesson for them as well, because they weren't here for some of the catastrophic choices that government made over the past nine years with respect to our economy. Just to simply let them know, what this government has done and why people are paying more and getting less in this province is because they continue to spend.

I want to cite something, and I'll actually summarize something that Dwight Duncan said in his speech: The first priority of this government to spend money is health care. The second is education. The third-largest spending priority of this Liberal government is servicing the debt and the deficit. With the exception of health care and education, it is higher than every other ministry combined; it is the highest of every other government department combined, with the exception of health care and education. Every single dollar we spend on serving the debt and the deficit is a dollar taken away from health care and education—and we still are raising taxes. So what's happening here, ladies and gentlemen? They have a spending problem.

This is no surprise to anybody. This morning I woke up, and I was listening to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would ask the member to stick to Bill 19. She's drifting into other areas.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you, Speaker, but my main contention here is that the HST was so fundamentally flawed when it was brought in that it has created this trickle-down effect and Ontarians are paying more. My thesis here, Mr. Speaker, is that the folks are paying more as a result of the HST. They're getting less of it. What they see with their tax dollars when they send them to Queen's Park is not better rental facilities, it's not better

health care. You know what they see? They see Ornge. This morning, I was listening to a radio station here in Toronto, Newstalk 1010. They were talking about Ornge and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): This will be my last suggestion to you to stick to Bill 19. Now we're on Ornge?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, the HST is what caused this bill. There is a correlation between the amount of taxes we pay to this government and what they've done with those taxation dollars. That is why it's a fundamental concern to the people who are either landlords or tenants in this province, on where their tax dollars are going.

I think that's a significant question that this government needs to answer. I think that they have taken a significant amount of revenue that they've raised off the backs of taxpayers, tenants, landlords, small business owners, families and seniors across this province and they've wasted it. Now we're talking about a bill that was brought in as a result of the HST because this bill doesn't go far enough in actually addressing the real problem here in this province, which is making life more affordable. What they did is they raised taxes. Now they're raising rents and they're hurting landlords at the same time.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: They're hurting everyone.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: And they're hurting everyone, as my colleague from Northumberland—Quinte West says. So the question before them now becomes: How do they make this province more affordable and how do they get a control on the economy? Because, ladies and gentlemen, they haven't shown in the past nine years that they're capable of that. That's why we don't have confidence in this government.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm very pleased to introduce, sitting in the west members' gallery, the family of a page from Thornhill, Andrew Mohan, who I had the pleasure of having lunch with the other day: his mom, Deborah Mohan; his dad, Timothy Mohan; his grandfather William Broadhurst; and his grandmother Arden Broadhurst. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'd like to introduce the interns from OLIP who are here today: Evan Akriotis, Patrick DeRochie, Belinda Ellsworth, Lauren Hanna, Humera Jabir, Sylvia Kim, Diego Ortiz, Sylvia Pena, Craig Rutan and Monika Wyrzykowska. They are here to watch the proceedings, but also to make sure that the members know that there is an OLIP reception tonight from 4:30 to 7 o'clock in room 228. They hope all the members of the Legislature will attend.

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's my pleasure to introduce some very good friends of mine in the members' east gallery this morning: Dr. Steven Franklin, the president and vice-chancellor of Trent University; Dr. Neil Emery, the vice-president of research at Trent University; and Mr. Don Cumming, associate vice-president of public affairs and government relations. I invite all members of the Legislature to join us from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. in committee room 2 to celebrate Trent University.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'd like to introduce four guests from North Bay Police Service. We have Staff Sergeant Mike Tarini, Sergeant Ken Rice, forensic information officer Ivan Ryman, and Constable Aaron Northrup here today, and I'll be joining them for lunch later.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'd like to welcome from the city of Timmins and the Timmins Police Association the president who is here, Mike Fortin, along with their vice-president—I was going to say Lisa; my God, I don't believe I did that—Lindsie Durepos. How's it going?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a page here—the last session—from Thunder Bay—Atikokan, Sarah McPherson. Visiting Sarah here and visiting Queen's Park this week are her mother, Tracy Shields, and her cousin Halle Kunjah. I welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I know they've been introduced as a group, but I want to introduce, joining us in the public galleries this morning, my intern from the OLIP program, Craig Ruttan. I've got to tell you what an amazing addition he's been to our office. He's doing a fine job, as they all do, but I want to single out Craig because he is the intern working for me.

Mr. Kim Craiton: I'm really pleased to introduce some representatives from the Niagara Regional Police who are here in the members' gallery. I'd like to introduce Cathy Portolesi. As well, I'd like to introduce Rick Gordon and Vince Wong. I want to thank them for the great service they provide to the Niagara region as police.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I'd like to welcome some honoured guests from the Halton Regional Police Association to the Legislature today: Duncan Foot, Kevin Neufeld, Lesley Martin and Rick LoStracco, who I met with earlier today and who are visiting Queen's Park as part of Police Week.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: In the east members' gallery I'd like to introduce my daughter, Natasha, and her friend Erica Beasley visiting from Whitehorse in the Yukon. We also have a grade 10 class from St. Augustine Catholic High School in the public gallery, and also my intern, Diego Ortiz.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome some people from Belleville that are on the way to the Legislature today, likely stuck in traffic. Alan and Donna Corrie, and their grandsons Ben and Will Smith, will be arriving shortly.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Dr. Ken and Lori Lee from London are here. Welcome, Dr. Ken and Lori.

Also, Speaker, the Personal Support Network of Ontario, the voice of PSW professionals in the province: I've got Maureen Hylton, Derrick Harrison, Connie Xoliswiwe

and Jane Clarkson here, as well as Lori Holloway, Sarah Blakely and Chris Holcroft. Welcome to all our PSWs.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Today, obviously, police from across Ontario will be joining us. I'd like to make a special mention to those from the Ottawa police force who are joining us. In the gallery today is another Ottawa police officer, but he is with the OPP. I'd like to introduce Todd Provost. How are you today, Todd? Thanks for coming.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce members from the Police Association of Ontario: Jim Christie, Ron Middel and Ed Parent. I invite all of you to join us at 5 o'clock for the reception at the St. Lawrence lounge in the Macdonald Block.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I join the minister, Speaker, on behalf of the PC caucus, in welcoming all members of the PAO here today, and I invite the members and encourage them to join them at the reception later this evening.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I want to introduce two police officers from the Greater Sudbury Police Service, Danny Zymbrowski and Brian MacRury, and thank them very much for their incredible dedication to the people of Sudbury.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just a point: When we get to strictly introducing everyone, we give them a good round, and I appreciate the members staying to that process. Most people can introduce everybody, but for those who have not been invited, we welcome you here to the Legislature, the people's place.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Premier. For months we've been warning you that if Ontario doesn't get its economic fundamentals right, our province faces continued job losses and high unemployment. A look at Greece and Italy today shows you the consequences of the path that you are on. No company is interested in investing or creating jobs in those countries today. For months, you've ignored our pleas for the urgent action required to restore Ontario. We have been giving your government viable options to rein in spending. What are you prepared to do today, right now, to take us off this current path?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I welcome the question from my honourable colleague, and I'm pleased to join in what I think is a very important debate about the future of Ontario's economy. But I would respectfully suggest to my honourable colleague that it is both inappropriate and, I would also say, irresponsible to compare the great province of Ontario, with our wonderful foundational strength in terms of our economy, to less fortunate places around the world. I think that while we might debate the best way to get there, surely we can begin by agreeing that we

have a wonderful province, that we have a strong economy. Our shared responsibility is not to castigate it, it is not to undermine confidence in it, but to find a way to make it even stronger.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Premier, it's unfortunate that you continue to ignore the problems that our province has. Since you won't act, we will. Later today, on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus, I will introduce legislation that will bring in a mandatory wage freeze for the public sector. Such a wage freeze would save Ontario \$2 billion annually and be a major step forward to getting our economic fundamentals right. It would send an important signal to investors, entrepreneurs, companies and rating agencies that we are serious about dealing with our spiralling debt.

Premier, will you help us restore Ontario as the economic engine of Confederation and support our mandatory wage freeze?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I appreciate the enthusiasm coming from the side opposite, but we actually have some common ground here. Where we differ is in terms of how to get there.

We have said in our budget very specifically that there is no new money available for newly negotiated collective agreements. We've made that very, very clear. But we've also drawn lessons from the experience in other provinces. None have adopted the approach advocated by my honourable colleague; neither has the federal government.

We intend to negotiate firmly and fairly with our collective bargaining partners. If we fail to achieve the result that we need that will maintain our fiscal plan, then we'll take additional steps in this very Legislature to ensure we arrive at that. I think that's the sensible way, I think that's the most guaranteed way, of arriving at our destination.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Premier, you tried that two years ago and failed. It's not good enough anymore.

Seven months ago, the people of Ontario sent us back here to deal with our jobs crisis and our high unemployment, but all you've done is make things worse. It's clear the Premier is happy with Ontario being a have-not province, with anemic economic growth, and saddling our future generations with his debt.

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On this side of the House, we know we can do better. We know Ontario can do better. Today, we are tabling legislation that enables our province to realize that bright future. Ontario can be strong again. Why won't you change course and support our mandatory wage freeze?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Maybe there's a leadership contest under way over there, Speaker.

Again, we have some common ground here. We both understand how important it is for us to restrain the growth in compensation. More than half the money that is spent as a government goes into compensation. And that, of course, Speaker, is money well spent when invested in doctors, teachers, nurses, water inspectors, meat inspectors and the like. We think that's a very important investment that we make on the part of Ontario families.

But we also think it's very important that today we hit the pause button for a couple of years. We're going to do it in a way which we believe is responsible and, ultimately, effective. We'll do it in a way that has been adopted by the other provinces and the federal government. We will work with our collective bargaining partners.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Premier, yesterday you missed a golden opportunity to have an adult conversation with Ontarians about their rising hydro bills. Instead, you chose to play politics with comments about Niagara Falls.

Well, let's talk about Niagara Falls and what you allowed to happen there last year. In addition to the rich subsidies we pay for wind producers, we also make guarantees to buy their power at any time it's made. This happens mostly at night, when we don't need the power. So, Premier, you allowed water to spill over Niagara Falls without harnessing that power through infrastructure we've already paid for. That cost taxpayers \$300 million last year. Premier, do you plan to continue to spill water over Niagara Falls next year?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that my honourable colleague, secretly at least, is very supportive of renewable energy policy in the province of Ontario. He was an active champion on behalf of the great city of North Bay in that regard, and we were pleased to partner with him in that very important initiative, Speaker.

But I will say, and I think it's important to keep in mind, that while our electricity bills have been going up, it's important to understand that 5% of the bill is related to renewable electricity in the province of Ontario. The overwhelming majority of that is related to the investments we've been making: billions of dollars, 9,000 megawatts in new generation, 5,000 kilometres of new transmission, expanding our capacity at Niagara Falls and the like.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, in addition to the \$300 million spilled over Niagara Falls, let's look at some of the other high-cost items that are causing our families' hydro bills to soar: smart meters, \$1 billion; the politically motivated gas plant closures in Oakville and Mississauga, another \$1 billion, or maybe more. The Auditor General told us the feed-in tariff subsidy cost \$4.4 billion more than through the existing standard offer. We're talking about serious money here, Premier.

Yesterday, our PC Party rolled out our Paths to Prosperity plan. Premier, will you adopt our plan to restore

the power sector to its rightful place as an economic development tool in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That horse ran out of the barn a long time ago.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We have an ally, Speaker.

For the day, anyway, we have an ally.

I would say to my honourable colleague that—it's interesting. I think this is eighth question, if my count is right, with respect to their new plan related to energy, but they refuse to talk about the particulars in this House about their plan.

I think it's important that we devote at least a little bit of time to understanding what they're proposing. They want to sell off our hydro assets. They want to take us back to a time 10 years ago where, within the span of seven months, electricity rates went up by 30%. They then responded by putting in place an artificial cap. That cost us \$1 billion. That's a debt that we continue to struggle with to this very day. That's a failed experiment, Speaker. I think it's time for us to understand that and to keep moving forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, your legacy now includes the doubling of our hydro rates in addition to the doubling of our debt. Not only has Moody's downgraded the province's credit rating, now Hydro One's credit rating has been downgraded too. That, too, is going to cost ratepayers more money.

Companies like Fabrene in North Bay, who I introduced in this gallery some weeks ago, who now pay \$1 million in global adjustment on top of their hydro bill, can now expect to pay even more, thanks to your flawed strategy.

Premier, it's evident that everything you touch in the energy sector costs taxpayers and ratepayers even more money. Our party has developed a 13-point plan, a plan to make energy an economic development tool. Will you adopt our plan and put Ontario back to work?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker—

Interjection.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: That's you guys; that's not them.

Again, I think it's important we understand that my honourable colleague is secretly a champion of green energy—green, clean and renewable energy—in the province of Ontario. As the mayor of North Bay, he was relentless in the pursuit of putting solar panels on the rooftops of some buildings there, which speaks, I think, of—it's been said, Speaker, that actions speak louder than words. I want to assure my honourable colleague that he has been most eloquent with respect to his actions. I am mindful, and I have taken those actions to heart. I know he continues—secretly, at least—to champion our plan to bring more renewable energy to the province of Ontario.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Reliable, affordable electricity is vital if Ontario is going to succeed in bringing jobs back and making life affordable for people. Can the Premier tell us how much of Ontario's electricity generation is currently publicly owned and operated?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As the members would know, well over 70% of Ontario's generation capacity is publicly owned, publicly operated, owned by all of the people of the province of Ontario—well over. Those would be our nuclear stations, which generate about half; our hydroelectric stations, which are over 20%; and then a number of gas-fired facilities and some coal that we're getting out of. It's well over—well over—70%.

That's going to remain unless the PCs get their way, when they're just going to sell off hydros, nukes and everything else that isn't nailed down.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In fact, in 2003, about 72% of the province's electricity was produced by Ontario Power Generation. As of 2010, that figure had dropped to 62%. Over that same period, the price has climbed by 75%.

The government says they're focused on the best way to keep prices affordable, but prices keep rising dramatically. Is the government ready to consider that private power schemes may in fact be a big part of the problem?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Speaker, not only do we continue to run, through OPG, the generation facilities, but Bruce Power, which is a private company, the assets are owned by the people of the province of Ontario. We have a very strong public footprint—always have, and always intend to.

What we've said to all of those who generate electricity in the province of Ontario is that we're determined that it be done as efficiently and effectively as possible. There are cost containment and cutting measures in place in OPG and Hydro One. We're moving to international benchmarking. We're taking a look at all the local distribution companies, and we're saying, can it be done more effectively? We reduced the feed-in tariff rates for green energy at the top end by 30%.

We're looking everywhere to find the most effective way to deliver power to the people of the province of Ontario.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: For people worried about good jobs and the cost of everyday life, the arrival of the monthly hydro bill can actually be a pretty traumatizing experience.

The debate is very clear: Some are arguing that repeating the same old private power experiments that haven't been working is the solution; we're saying that it's time to look at what is actually working in provinces like Manitoba and Quebec, where people are paying literally

half of what we pay here. Will the government commit to an open and transparent review of the entire electricity system?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: You know, we'd all like to commit to the geography in Quebec and Manitoba, but we haven't found a way to do that.

I think the party opposite should be clear. A substantial part of the publicly owned generation assets are nuclear, and they've consistently said they oppose nuclear and the almost 80,000 jobs in the province of Ontario that go with it. A substantial part in the change of the energy mix over the last eight years is that we're getting out of coal. It was 25% when we came; it's less than 5% today.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton, come to order. The member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan, come to order.

Minister.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: It was 25% when we started in 2003; it's less than 5% today.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Simcoe—Grey, come to order.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I hope the leader of the third party is supportive of that. Green energy is part of the new mix: wind, solar and bio. When will the leader of the third party stand up and support clean green energy?

MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. Last week, the government assured this Legislature and the public that First Nations partners were being properly consulted about development in the Ring of Fire. Today, we're hearing a very different story from the Neskantaga First Nation, whose legal counsel asserts that the government breached its legal duty to consult. Why has this government shown no serious willingness—and those are the First Nation's words—to address the concerns of Neskantaga and other Matawa First Nations?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Mr. Speaker, I'll speak to this at the outset and then refer it to the minister.

I just want to say that we take our responsibilities very seriously when it comes to consulting with our First Nations partners. We understand there is both a legal obligation there, but we also feel a sense of responsibility, on behalf of all Ontarians, to make sure that we are working with our First Nations partners, especially when it comes to exciting new opportunities to be found in the Ring of Fire. I know that specific efforts were made to reach out to those communities in the past. We will continue to find ways to move forward.

None of this is going to be easy, but more than anything else, I think it does represent a hopeful, bright opportunity, especially when it comes to resource benefit

sharing with our aboriginal partners to ensure that they can participate in economic growth as we move forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, according to media reports, Neskantaga Chief Peter Moonias is afraid to say hi to the minister for fear that the McGuinty government will interpret that as meaningful consultation.

It's clear that the government is bungling this, and thousands of jobs in the Ring of Fire for northerners actually hang in the balance. When will this government stop putting the cart before the horse and have a full discussion with First Nations partners that includes a proper environmental assessment and the creation of a regional decision-making forum?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said in this House, we are very clear that in order for the Ring of Fire development to go forward—and remember that the Ring of Fire is the most promising economic mineral development opportunity in the north that we've seen in a generation. So in order for it to go forward in the best way possible, we know that this is a partnership: the federal government, First Nations, the provincial government and the companies working together.

So we've been very clear that the formal process of engagement will begin. There was a business decision that was made, and in order for First Nations not to discover this the day of the announcement in the newspaper, we reached out to many of the communities the day before. We had a conversation with them.

But we've been making investments for a year. We've invested \$8 million in the Ring of Fire communities. We will continue that engagement now.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The promise will not be realized unless this government gets serious about doing right by First Nations in northern Ontario.

New Democrats have long called, in fact, for a stand-alone Minister of Aboriginal Affairs who can devote their full attention to the priorities concerning First Nations. The mishandling of the Cliffs announcement only underscores this need. It is very clear: This has to happen in Ontario.

When will this government take their duty to consult with First Nations seriously and dedicate resources to do so?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, this is the government that set up a stand-alone Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, not that party when they were in office. We set up the ministry and we are working in conjunction with First Nations. We are very clear that there will be a formal engagement, there will be a discussion.

I say to the leader of the third party, she has a choice right now. She has a choice—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Calm down. Calm down, lady.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I did not find that appropriate.

Minister?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite who shouted out "Calm down"—I really believe that there's a need for an emotional engagement on this issue. I think that this is an important moment in Ontario's history. The importance of it is that we work together and that we not undermine the process.

There is a history of neglect and of conflict that we have to overcome in terms of working with our First Nations people. It is our commitment to do that. It is our commitment that the 1,100 jobs that are available will be shared with First Nations, and we are going to work to make that happen.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. I'm appealing to the Premier this morning to bring in line his government House leader, who has motions before him from this Legislature, as well as from the public accounts committee, requesting additional time and flexibility so that we can get to the bottom of the Ornge scandal.

We now have no hearings for this coming week because the government has refused to allow us to have them. We have two more days of hearings before the summer break. We specifically requested to be allowed to sit into the summer. Dr. Chris Mazza has yet to testify.

This morning, we heard that Ruth Hawkins, a senior person within the Ministry of Health, has a great deal of information. We need the additional time. Will the Premier agree to give us that time?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I've been following the committee hearings on Ornge carefully, of course, and I'm very pleased that so many people have participated in a meaningful way at those hearings. I myself was very happy to be there for two and a half hours, about an hour and a half longer than I was asked to attend.

There is important work that is being done at that committee. If the member opposite wants to conduct the hearings here on the floor of the Legislature, I tell you, I would like to know more about a \$7,000 invoice that Kelly Mitchell, a top Tory insider, expensed to prepare a strategy for engaging the Ontario PC Party. I'd like to know more about the work that he did with Lynne Golding, a top Conservative lawyer; and Perry Martin, a top Tory lobbyist, to lobby the opposition.

Speaker, there are questions that need answers and we're happy that the committee is meeting.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, I can't even believe what I just heard from the mouth of this Minister of Health. Serious issues: Two people died this past week; ambulance services couldn't respond to a call. There are serious issues at Ornge ambulance and this minister has the gall to stand up and talk about a consulting agreement that someone received from Ornge.

Minister, I'm going to ask you directly: Will you stand in your place, stand with us, help us get to the bottom of the issue that you should be at the bottom of? Give us the

additional time. Give us the hearings so that we can restore confidence in our air ambulance service.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Health.

1100

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I can assure you that the changes that have been made at Ornge and the changes that continue to be made at Ornge are not waiting for any process that the member opposite wants to champion.

While they've been busy ringing the bells, we've been busy fixing the problems at Ornge. We have new leadership, we have a new performance agreement, a much stronger performance agreement, and we have legislation before this House that I would very much like to get passed. This is legislation that trenches in law the oversight and transparency that we all agree we need at Ornge. I'm asking the member opposite to stop ringing the bells and let's get this work done.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Today, former Ornge vice-president Jacob Blum testified that he had weekly meetings with officials at the Ministry of Health. He said the ministry was happy with the reports they were receiving and noted that the ministry was fully informed of all things going on at Ornge. But despite these regular meetings, the minister "never asked" about salary disclosure.

How can the minister claim that her office didn't know what was going on at Ornge?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I know that the former executive assistant to Dr. Chris Mazza did testify today. I tell you, I take the word of the Attorney General over the former executive assistant to the former president and CEO of Ornge.

What I can tell you is that we are moving forward with legislation that addresses the issues that were raised by the Auditor General. We've already taken significant steps that even the member from Newmarket-Aurora characterized as being aggressive changes. So we are making those changes. We continue to watch with interest the hearings, but we do need that bill to be passed.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, Mr. Blum, one of the original negotiators of the original performance agreement, told the committee what we already knew: The ministry had many tools that they could have used to check up on Ornge. He said the minister could "audit and check files within any aspect of Ornge ... whether that was the left or the right side of the organizational structure," referring to the for-profit or the not-for-profit.

Has the minister been blaming the performance agreement because she's hesitant of blaming herself?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me begin by correcting myself: I said Attorney General; I should have said Auditor General in my first answer.

But I do take the word of the Auditor General over the former employees under the old leadership at Ornge. The Auditor General said the performance agreement was weak, it was not adequate, it needed to be significantly strengthened. The Auditor General, in a March 21 press conference, said, "The ministry has stepped in and taken concrete actions." The Auditor General's report says the performance agreement has only two specific and measurable response time requirements relating to requests for air ambulance services.

The Auditor General did a thorough review. We are acting on each and every one of those recommendations and we are going further by introducing legislation. I ask all members to support Bill 50.

GO TRANSIT

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. Minister, those of us who live in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area know that GO Transit is a critical provincial service that binds our communities together while taking cars off our roads and highways. Many of my constituents depend on reliable, economic service on three different GO corridors: the Stouffville, Richmond Hill and Barrie lines. With five GO train stations and another to be added soon in my riding of Oak Ridges-Markham, many people in my community, as well as places like Aurora and Newmarket, use these lines as vital links between home and work through the GTA.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, what is being done to enhance this service to make it as attractive an option as possible?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I want to thank the member for Oak Ridges-Markham for raising an important issue for GTA travellers. GO Transit is an essential part of daily life for more than 219,000 Ontarians who depend on a reliable service to get them to and from work. That's why we're proud to confirm that beginning in late June, GO will be running an additional train during the morning and afternoon rush hours on the Milton line, and will be initiating a new weekend pilot service of six trains daily each way on the Barrie line.

Likewise, as this week marks the 45th anniversary of GO Transit, I was also pleased to reveal that we will be moving forward and implementing our 15-minute service guarantee, beginning this fall. This kind of action, Mr. Speaker, is an essential part of building stronger and more dependable public transit to serve the greater Golden Horseshoe area.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Minister. Indeed, providing a timely and reliable commute is important, but as we enter the summer months, GO Transit has the potential to play a key role in facilitating regional tourism, which largely occurs on weekends. Whether it's someone

from King City coming into Toronto to attend a concert or a Blue Jays game, or a Torontonians spending a weekend up on Lake Simcoe, this kind of internal tourism is so important for our regional and provincial economy. GO Transit helps make that happen, but only if it's available where and when people want to travel. Tremendous progress has been made, given the neglected service the government inherited.

Mr. Speaker, again through you, what are the next steps being taken in the near term as we move progressively towards two-way, all-day service?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. GO Transit is so important in moving people across the region. The expansion of a transit system as large as GO is an ongoing process, but with more than \$6 billion already invested, we've made significant headway. Not only did we restore service to Barrie after it was cancelled by the NDP and left cancelled by the Conservatives, but as I mentioned, we're expanding that service to Barrie. We brought GO train service to Kitchener. We're expanding service north of Richmond Hill. We brought summer GO train service to Niagara Falls. And for the first time this summer, we're introducing GO bus service to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Mr. Speaker, the Tories downloaded GO Transit onto the backs of the municipalities and cut capital funding to zero. We're taking a different approach because this service is so important to so many Ontarians.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Minister of Health. Speaker, the minister has repeatedly claimed that Ornge lied to her, but it's become clear at public accounts that Ornge, in fact, made a great effort to keep both the minister and the ministry fully briefed. In fact, we learned that the Ministry of Health and Ornge met and received a briefing every Friday. So I ask the minister, can she tell us who specifically lied to her and what they lied to her about?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I have to confess that I'm pretty surprised that the member opposite is now leaping to the defence of the former leadership at Ornge. I can tell you that the Auditor General found it very difficult to get information from Ornge. My ministry officials found it very difficult to get information at Ornge. It was only when I made it very clear to the former board chair and COO that I expected them to cooperate with the Auditor General, that I expected them to reveal salaries, that they in fact did reveal that information, and shortly after retired en masse. So if the member opposite wants to take the word of the former leadership at Ornge over the Auditor General, I'm very surprised.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: The point is, Mr. Speaker, that the minister was very clearly aware of the disastrous mess at Ornge and chose to take no action about it. She also claims that the original performance agreement didn't allow her to intervene. That is not correct. She also claimed that the federal incorporation of Ornge prevented

her from acting. That had nothing to do with anything. That also isn't correct. She has repeatedly abdicated her responsibility on the grounds that Ornge misled and lied to her. However, both Alfred Apps and Jacob Blum, who appeared in public accounts this morning, have stated that the Ministry of Health had been fully, truthfully and painstakingly briefed on matters at Ornge.

So it's clear that no one lied to the minister, that she had the power to intervene and simply chose not to do so. As a result, the mess at Ornge is now costing patients their lives. Minister, will you do the right thing and resign?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Health.

1110

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the first thing I must do is caution the member opposite from jumping to any conclusions about any incidents. There's a full investigation under way, and I would just caution all of us not to jump to any conclusions.

I can tell the member opposite that I do have some questions that I think—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The interjections from both sides are not helpful.

Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I would like to know more about how it came to pass that Ornge established a new satellite operation at Oshawa Municipal Airport.

Here's what we do know: A former Ornge executive said he opposed the move and that it was a very poor choice for a host of reasons. We also know that the member for Whitby-Ajax not only lobbied to get a base at the airport in her riding; she also, of course, posed for that famous snazzy photo in Ornge.

Interjection.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, we look forward to learning more at Ornge. These are important questions we need answers to, and I'm happy we are having those—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke: second time.

New question.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Peterborough, come to order.

New question.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of Education. Yesterday, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities wrote that the anti-bullying bill would likely go to court. If he's right and students are denied the ability to use the name "gay-straight alliance" in a school, will your government back those students?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to have a chance to talk about an important piece of legislation that is now before committee in this Legislature. I have set out very clearly the expectations, and our government has set out clearly the expectations, of the support that will be available to students in the document of the Accepting Schools Act. My expectation, Speaker, is that every board in every part of this province will abide by the policies, that are clearly stated, that the school needs to support student-led initiatives such as a gay-straight alliance. We've been very clear since the beginning.

What we know is that we need to see this piece of legislation passed, so that we have the tools we need to ensure that students across this province have the support they need. Let's get this bill passed. Let's have these rules in place. Let's have support for our students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, my question is very simple: If students are denied the right to use the name "gay-straight alliance," will this government back the students and their own law?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: My focus is on listening to the advice that we receive at committee. My focus is on getting Bill 13 passed so that we can have the tools in place to ensure that this bill, which requires support for students in the form of gay-straight alliances or single-issue clubs, can be enforced across this province.

I ask the members opposite, on all sides of the House, especially those calling: Will they support us? Will they see this legislation passed? Will they see support in place for students across the province? Are they with the students, or are they with others in this province that don't want to see students be supported? That is the question that all of you must answer.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just before I recognize the member, I want to make a quick point: You're always referencing your questions and answers through the Chair.

New question.

ONTARIO POWER GENERATION AND HYDRO ONE

Mr. Phil McNeely: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, Ontario Power Generation is one of the most important public assets in the province. They are responsible for producing most of Ontario's base-load generation, and they manage many of Ontario's large generating facilities. I know that Niagara hydro facilities produce close to 2,400 megawatts; that's enough electricity to power over 1.2 million homes. Furthermore, they account for close to 7% of Ontario's total supply. These important OPG assets are providing Ontario families with safe, clean, reliable power. Ontario families and businesses have a vested interest in OPG and all of our generating facilities in the province.

Minister, can you please provide this House with an update on the status of OPG and its generating facilities in the Niagara region?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I want to thank the member from Ottawa-Orléans for his question. He has long been an advocate of environmentally conscious approaches to energy policy.

He'll be pleased to know that there's a new tunnel going in at Niagara Falls that's going to provide enough additional water to the generating facilities to power 160,000 homes—more clean, green generation. The great thing about that is it's all owned by the people of the province of Ontario, as public power has been in place for about a century.

It's important that we all have a stake in this, because our power facilities are part of our economic foundation. All families in Ontario want to have a piece of this province. If the PC plan is implemented, they're not going to have that. It's going to be auctioned off. They'll lose part of their heritage. They tried this in the late 1990s; it didn't work. Let's not go back; always look forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Minister. I know that my constituents are pleased to hear that this government will protect these vital facilities from being sold off.

We often focus on the generation of electricity. However, an equally vital part of our electricity system is the distribution of electricity from the generating facilities to our homes and businesses.

Hydro One, another vital public asset, is responsible for ensuring that Ontario families and businesses get the electricity they need when they need it. Just last month, you informed this House that Hydro One continues to rebuild our electricity system, and they have built over 5,000 kilometres of new transmission lines. This is an accomplishment that my constituents are very proud of.

Minister, can you please provide this House with an update on the status of Hydro One and their efforts to modernize our electricity system?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The member is right, because Hydro One has been doing a lot of work to modernize and upgrade a transmission system that hadn't had the upgrades it needs—5,000 kilometres-plus of new line, enough to take us from here to the Yukon. That's an enormous investment on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario.

I know that others in this House, the party opposite, the PCs, want to sell off Hydro One. They tried this once before. It resulted in rocketing, rocketing electricity prices. In fact, it was so bad that I have a quote from back there—I have a quote from 2003: "Consumers want to be assured their hydro bills are reasonable. First, it was by freezing hydro rates, and secondly, by maintaining full public ownership of Hydro One." Who said this on January 21, 2003? Who said it? The Leader of the Opposition.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, many MPPs are receiving a significant number of complaints from constituents

regarding the Ministry of Natural Resources' electronic licensing system. We all know that when the system was introduced on January 1, there were significant delays and operational problems with it. However, today, when you call the ministry's 1-800 number, you are greeted by a recording that says, "Personal information may be stored outside of Canada and is subject to the laws of the jurisdiction where it is stored." Ontarians are pretty outraged at this.

Minister, do you think it's right that a ministry of the Ontario government would ship the confidential information of Ontario citizens to another country, where it is subject to its laws, and how can you assure Ontarians that this information will not be accessed by another government or third party for their own purposes?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, we are rolling out a new, modern system that will make it easier for anglers and hunters to get their licences, and we've been working through some of the challenges associated with that. I think it's working in a very positive way.

In terms of the privacy issues, let me be very straightforward. Obviously, we take privacy issues very, very seriously. We've raised those concerns with the company and reminded them of their obligations to protect Ontarians' privacy. We also have built extremely tough protections into the company's contract. They cannot disclose any information without prior approval from us. And may I say, the very tough provisions of Ontario's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act absolutely apply.

I can confirm to you that indeed we are watching this very closely. It's very important to us that we maintain the privacy provisions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Minister, your 1-800 recording says that the personal data is collected for purposes of identification, enforcement, research, marketing and administration—that pretty much covers everything—and you claim that this personal and confidential information is being protected. So why does the ministry have this disclaimer on the 1-800 number, which again says, "Personal information may be stored outside of Canada and is subject to the laws of the jurisdiction where it is stored," not Ontario?

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Can you and will you cancel this contract and ensure that this data is retained in Ontario, or do Ontarians have to live with this bad decision?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Obviously, there was a company that was the successful proponent in a competitive procurement process as we moved forward on this new automated licensing system. Again, we take the privacy provisions extremely seriously, which is why we have built very those tough provisions into the company's contract. It's also why the very, very clear and tough provisions of Ontario's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act apply.

We are taking this very, very seriously, building in a very strong contract agreement with the company that was the successful proponent of this as we move towards the system that will actually make it easier for people to access hunting and fishing licences across the province.

CANCER TREATMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The annual report from the Cancer Quality Council of Ontario paints a picture of unequal access to care in cancer hospitals across the province. Patients in Ottawa are waiting longer for radiation treatment than almost everywhere else in the province, with only 66% of patients treated within the recommended 14 days compared to a provincial average of over 80%. Many are questioning whether quality care is being compromised.

Can the Premier explain to Ottawa's patients how they could have fallen so far behind?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thanks to the leader of the third party for the question. I want to say, first of all, thank you to the Cancer Quality Council of Ontario for this report. We have learned that if you measure and if you publicly report, you can actually improve performance in the health care system. This report shows that we have made significant improvements to cancer care, but there is still more to do.

Ontarians are living longer with cancer. Our cancer survival rates in Ontario are very high compared with international jurisdictions. But we do need to improve the care. With this report, we can continue to improve care. We are very pleased that we're meeting the targeted wait times 80% of the time. That's up from 69%. There's much good news in this report, but there's also indication of further work to be done.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ottawa is regrettably not the only region that has fallen behind. Windsor has the unfortunate status of having the longest wait time in the province for radiation treatment, with only 55% of patients receiving radiation treatment within the recommended 14-day period. Families in London are also seeing long waits.

Can the Premier explain why Ontarians' access to life-saving cancer treatment depends on where you happen to live in this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Addressing those inequities is, of course, a very high priority for us, but whenever you rank, some will always be at the bottom and some will always be at the top. I do think, though, that equitable access to care is something we should all be striving for.

We have come a long, long way since 2003 when it comes to cancer care. We've got 13 cancer centres that have been opened, expanded or are now under construction. We've got an additional 65 cancer drugs that we are funding. We are looking forward to also implementing a personalized cancer risk profile online, where

people will be able to enter information about their family history, about their own history, be identified at what level of risk they are and take appropriate steps to prevent cancer.

CHILD PROTECTION

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Crown wards are often at a disadvantage when it comes to successfully transitioning to adulthood in terms of acquiring higher education, employment and emotional support. In November 2011, youth currently and formerly in the care of children's aid societies worked with the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth to organize two days of public hearings at the Legislature on their experience. On Monday, I was very proud to attend the release of their report that was produced, entitled *My Real Life Book*.

Speaker, through you, I ask the minister how the government has helped to improve the child protection system in recent years.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I thank my colleague from Windsor West for the question and for her ongoing advocacy on this important issue.

I also want to extend my sincere thanks to the Youth Leaving Care team and the provincial advocate for their report, which I know was the result of an incredible amount of hard work.

I was privileged on Monday, as well, to accept this groundbreaking report and hear from many of the courageous youth who played a big part in creating it.

Through this government's Building Families and Supporting Youth to be Successful Act, 2011, and other important reforms, we've made it easier for prospective parents to adopt a child. This is helping to provide permanent homes for more crown wards. In fact, since 2003, and despite a rising population, we've seen a 3% decrease in the number of children in care and in the past few years alone a more than 20% increase in adoptions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: I thank the minister for his answer. Both the youth team and advocate should be commended for their hard work. Our government has done a lot to support and improve the child protection system. Fewer kids are coming into care and more kids are being placed in permanent homes and we continue to invest in our children. Building on these reforms and accomplishments, I believe this report presents a real opportunity to continue positive change in the system. I was pleased to introduce a private member's bill in response to the release of the report.

Speaker, once again through you, I ask the minister to outline what action the government is taking in response to this report.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Again, I'd like to thank the member from Windsor West.

Mr. Speaker, in response to the Youth Leaving Care team's report, I was pleased to announce that we are

taking immediate action on their number one priority recommendation emerging from this report. I have directed my ministry to immediately bring together a working group, as requested by the team, comprised of youth with experience living in care, along with partners from across the province.

I'm also pleased that action has been taken on another important recommendation brought forward by these youth in the report. My colleague the member from Windsor West earlier this week introduced a private member's bill to designate May 14 each year as Children and Youth in Care Day. I invite all of my colleagues in the Legislature to join me and the member from Windsor West in passing this bill.

PENSION FUNDS

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Last week, you claimed to have published the unfunded liabilities of public sector pensions in the budget. This is not so. What is published is how much we already know Ontario taxpayers will be paying out, which includes over \$3.3 billion worth of pensions in 2014-15 alone. The numbers in the budget only include the next three years.

The question is, how much more will Ontario taxpayers have to pay on top of these figures? Minister, as the growing deficit looms to \$30 billion, what steps is the province going to take to fill in the gaps when it comes to funding public sector pensions?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite should be aware that valuation dates vary on these pension plans. Accordingly, as valuation dates move, we provided the most up-to-date information in the budget that's clear and follows the information that has, in fact, been determined by these large pension funds.

I do want to assure the members of those funds that they are solid, they are in good shape. They have challenges, as pension funds do everywhere. I note in your Pathways to Prosperity whitewash that you cite how strong our pensions are. You've invited them to invest and to buy Niagara Falls and to buy a number of other public assets.

I would also note that the member opposite's policy on compensation in Ontario has conveniently sidestepped the question of pensions. Why don't you mention it? There's a large section in our budget about dealing with pension costs. Your party's failed to do that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you, Minister.

Supplementary?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Minister, Ontarians are worried about the security of their pensions. Ontario public sector pension plans are short billions of dollars. Again, are you trying to hide the fact that there is an unfunded liability of billions of dollars? You've already admitted taxpayers are on the hook.

What is your plan to secure the future of public sector pensions, while being transparent with the taxpayers about how much they're on the hook for?

1130

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We are tackling the challenge in the pension funds with our partners. I'll remind the member opposite again that Mr. Drummond provided an analysis of where those pensions are at. The budget did that; the environment minister has that. I know how concerned he is about the Endangered Species Act as well.

I would suggest to the member opposite that you take the same serious approach to pensions that we do and read the budget, what we're proposing and where we're moving. You're silent on that in your wage-freeze information, which, candidly, does not get us to where we need to get in terms of balancing the budget in the time frames laid out.

I also note again, and remind the member opposite, that in your document released yesterday, you referred to the great pensions and the strengths of our pensions. You proposed to sell off Niagara Falls to them and some other assets, but we'll work with our partners as we move to get those pensions back into stronger shape.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, schedule 28 of your budget bill makes it possible to privatize any government service you want, by regulation, without anyone knowing what the government is up to.

Yesterday in question period, the minister claimed that the Auditor General would have jurisdiction over new corporations created under schedule 28, but when we consulted our expert legal opinions, they said this simply is not so. Will the minister retract the claim he made yesterday about the budget bill?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: No.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: That was quite informative. Thank you, Minister.

Speaker, this new piece of legislation allows the government, behind closed doors, to let private, for-profit corporations benefit from the fact that almost all Ontarians must use ServiceOntario at one time or another. These companies wouldn't be subjected to the oversight role of the Auditor General or the public accounts committee, nor would these private corporations be subject to freedom-of-information requests.

Why is the government so determined to push through legislation that sets another stage for more Ornge?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I was also referencing Bill 50, which we need to pass, that deals with the challenges we found at Ornge, applying new principles as we move forward to ensure that those goods and services operated both publicly and privately on behalf of the people of Ontario are delivered with a maximum amount of transparency and accountability. That's what this government has been about.

I remember, for instance, we applied freedom-of-information transparency to the hydro agencies. When

the previous government privatized them, gave secret contracts to their friends, we thought that was wrong.

We welcome the findings of the Auditor General and the forensic auditors from the Ministry of Finance with respect to the challenges that emerged in the Ornge situation. We welcome your advice with respect to how to improve that transparency and accountability. We think it's important. We are the government that has in fact—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, there has been an extensive conversation about anti-bullying legislation, both in this Legislature and in the media, and in schools all over the province.

There are currently two anti-bullying bills before this House: Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act, and Bill 14, which was originally introduced by the former MPP from Kitchener–Waterloo, Elizabeth Witmer. I know that the feedback I'm getting is that people in the community, people who are knowledgeable about bullying, would really like to see us combine those two bills so that we get the best of both bills.

But bullying is not just something that only happens within schools; it's something that is a very complex issue. I know that the government bill, the Accepting Schools Act, is part of a whole-school approach. Could you explain the whole-school approach?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I am very pleased, and I want to commend the member for her long history and advocacy on safe and inclusive schools and the work she has done in the past that has helped us get to where we are today, Speaker.

Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act, is a critical part of the work that we will do in this province to ensure that our schools are safe and inclusive. But it is just one part of a comprehensive action plan to end bullying in our schools and in our communities. We bring into that the investments in the children's mental health communities and the investments in the children's mental health sector that are now making their way into our schools and into our communities across the province.

We'll create an accepting schools expert panel to provide advice on things like early intervention and prevention to make sure that the programs that we use get it right. We're also going to be working with Ontario's curriculum council to ensure that we strengthen equity and inclusive education policies—all that part, as well as a public awareness campaign, of a comprehensive strategy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Through you, Speaker, bullying is something—we've all heard very tragic stories about children and youth who have been affected by bullying. I

think that Bill 13 and Bill 14 genuinely do reflect the will of this Legislature to do something about bullying.

But it isn't that we're starting from zero. In fact, there are many programs in schools that already address bullying. I wonder, Minister, if you could tell us about some of the programs that are already in place in schools.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: The member is quite right: There is much, much great work being done across the province. In the time I have to talk about it here—I won't have time to talk about all of those programs—I do want to say thank you to our school communities right across the province, our communities as a whole, who have taken a leadership role in this area.

I want to focus on one program in particular. I had a chance to connect with this program yet again this week when they had a forum here in Toronto. It's the Roots of Empathy program. It was founded by Mary Gordon in Toronto in 1996, and it's an incredibly amazing program, Speaker. I'm so proud that the Ministry of Education supports that program. It involves bringing a baby into classrooms to teach our youngest students—a young baby as the instructor to teach them about empathy. We know empathy is at the heart of what we need to do to ensure that our students are empathetic, they will be good leaders and we will have a good province.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Burlington on a point of order.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I'd like to welcome today Burlington Central High School and Mr. Fila. My only son, so therefore my favourite son, is here today visiting at Queen's Park, and I'm very happy to have him here: Mac McKenna.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to raise what I think is a point of order. Earlier in the session, when I was answering a question, the member from Simcoe North shouted out, "Calm down, lady." I would like to suggest that under 23(k)—although I admit I've been called worse, I believe that that language was used in an insulting manner. I would like a ruling on that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That is, regretfully, not a point of order. Only the member themselves can correct their own record.

The Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to encourage all members to attend the SEIU PSW reception taking place in room 230. Come say thank you to PSWs for providing great care.

Hon. James J. Bradley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Clifford Priest, Vincent Wong, Rick Gordon and Cathy Portolesi from the Niagara Region Police Association are here. I know you'd want to have them recognized. Perhaps you could rule whether that's a point of order or not.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Actually, it is not a point of order, but we always welcome our guests.

The member from Mississauga East–Cooksville.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: On a point of order, Speaker: I'd like to introduce two guests, Praveen Mologue and Javier Yanez, from my riding.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I do want to make a quick point on this. I do try my very best to get everyone introduced during the time allotted. These points of order are not points of order, but I would ask you to provide me with a little leeway in giving you the time during the assigned time to introduce guests. I'll try to do my best, but we do have to keep things moving, and I would ask you to try to refrain from these things, unless there are special moments where, obviously, a spouse or a son—your favourite son—is here. I would be more than willing to be accommodating in those circumstances.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GODERICH ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I rise today to pay tribute to the Goderich Legion and the Goderich Ladies Auxiliary on their 85th and 65th anniversaries, respectively. I was pleased to be at their anniversary dinner on May 5 to celebrate this occasion.

In Goderich, the Legion, branch 109, is an integral player within the community. They provide funding to a multitude of community groups, such as cadets, sports teams, cultural groups and seniors. They provide free-of-charge wheelchair and mobility assist programs to seniors or anyone in need, Legion members or not.

When the tornado ripped through Goderich last August, the Legion building was in the direct path of the F3. It sustained a lot of damage, but that did not set them back, as the Legion members and the ladies auxiliary teamed up to raise \$90,000 to help rebuild the community.

The Goderich Ladies Auxiliary was formed by 28 ladies in 1947. The ladies auxiliary spend much of their time supporting our veterans and fundraising for various community initiatives. Their longest-running annual fundraising event is the Snowflake Bazaar, held each November for the past 33 years, second only to the Friendship Breakfast that ran for 24 years. The ladies auxiliary will always be grateful to the 28 ladies who blazed the path for the ladies of today. They will always be proud of their motto: "Pride in our past, faith in our future."

I want to congratulate the Goderich Legion and Goderich Ladies Auxiliary and wish them many more years of continued advocacy, community involvement and success.

GILFORD AND DISTRICT LIONS CLUB

Mrs. Julia Munro: On Saturday afternoon, I will be joining the Gilford and District Lions Club as they hold

their annual fundraiser, selling fireworks at Trotter's Esso.

The Gilford lions club has held this fundraiser for 16 years and to date has profited over \$75,000, which has been distributed in the community and beyond. The profits have been invested in the community for people in need of assistance, local youth sports, guide dog training, camps for juvenile dialysis and CNIB camps as well. The fireworks fundraiser lasts four days, from Friday until Monday.

I would like to thank the lions club for their contributions to the local community, including John and Jean Hamilton, who are co-chairs and past presidents of the Gilford lions club. Also, thank you to the volunteers as well as John Trotter for hosting this special event each year.

It is my pleasure to be joining them on Saturday. I'm looking forward to purchasing some fireworks for the coming Victoria Day weekend. I wish the Gilford and District Lions Club, as well as my riding of York-Simcoe, a safe and happy Victoria Day weekend.

URBAN FORESTRY

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I rise to talk about the role of the provincial government in urban forestry. As you may well be aware, the emerald ash borer is destroying mature trees throughout the urban areas of southern Ontario. There is a call on the part of urban forestry activists for this government to actually step in and have an impact. I'll read their call.

"Whereas over 80% of Canadians now live in urban areas and have come to rely on the environmental, ecological and economic benefits of urban forests; and

"Whereas the health of Canadians is sustained by their urban forests which provide services through improving air quality, cooling city streets and buildings, acting as a windbreak, shading from harmful UV rays, and filtering storm water, as well as beautifying our communities; and

"Whereas neither the federal nor provincial governments currently include urban forestry in their mandates except in a limited role with respect to exotic, invasive pests; and....

"Whereas the emerald ash borer is expected to cost Canadians over \$2 billion in treatment and replanting;"

Urban forestry activists ask that provincial governments take this issue on, provide support to municipal governments and provide resources.

Speaker, the Ministry of Energy alone should be deeply interested in this issue because the impact of losing the urban forest on cooling will put huge burdens on electricity demand.

WINDSOR WEST INNOVATION

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: I rise today to speak about the innovation and excellence that is occurring in my riding and community. As I tour my riding, I'm constantly

inspired by the creative solutions and innovations local businesses and entrepreneurs are developing in Windsor.

Yesterday, the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation recognized researchers from the University of Windsor and Hydrostor for their underwater compressed air energy storage system. A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of attending an announcement by another research team who, in partnership with SunSource Grids, have developed a unique switch that will seamlessly take customers off the grid during sun-producing hours.

In addition to developing innovative products that will drive the future economy, Windsor will also be home to the new Rairdance centre, an incubator that will house the arts and film industry and position the region as a destination point for the creative class.

We are seeing innovation take root and flourish as a new way of life, from developing new cutting-edge apps to solar energy-powered golf carts to world-class research.

I'm also proud to welcome the Startup Canada tour, an entrepreneur-led national movement, to my home next week. If there's a place that can rethink it and create it, that place is called Windsor—Essex.

I'm proud of all the entrepreneurs and innovators in my riding. Speaker, I welcome you and all my colleagues to come to visit Windsor—Essex to see all the excitement.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Speaker, since the October 6 election, the PC Party has led three initiatives to stop further development of industrial wind turbines. The goal of these initiatives was to ensure that the local voices were involved in the approval process of the establishment of wind turbines, ending the massive subsidies to the wind companies and placing a moratorium on further development of wind turbines until a health study was done on the long-term effects of wind turbines.

Despite our efforts, the Liberal government, along with the NDP, voted against all three of our initiatives. The parties opposite voted against Bill 5, which was tabled by my colleague Todd Smith. They voted against my colleague Lisa Thompson's motion and they voted against our leader Tim Hudak's opposition day motion.

Despite our disappointment, we will not give up the fight. I oppose the heavy-handed approach that the McGuinty government is taking by forcing wind turbines on our local communities. Our party are determined to ensure the people of Ontario have a say, and I'm determined that the people across Lambton—Kent—Middlesex have a say.

Speaker, this government has pitted neighbour against neighbour, family member against family member, and I say enough is enough.

CYSTIC FIBROSIS

Mr. Michael Prue: May is Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month. Cystic fibrosis is the most common fatal genetic disease affecting Canadian children and young adults.

The effects of the disease are most devastating in the lungs, and ultimately, most deaths related to cystic fibrosis are due to lung disease.

Today there are more than 4,000 Canadians living with cystic fibrosis. Cystic Fibrosis Canada is a national health charity with 51 volunteer chapters. The organization has its sights set squarely on finding a cure and to help people and families affected by cystic fibrosis cope with their daily fight.

I'm pleased to welcome here today a representative from Cystic Fibrosis Canada, Andrew Guzzwell, who's here in the members' gallery.

Since 1960, Cystic Fibrosis Canada has invested more than \$140 million in leading CF research and care, resulting in one of the world's highest survival rates for people with cystic fibrosis. Today, nearly 60% of Canadians with cystic fibrosis are over the age of 18.

However, despite progress, there is no cure, and each week in Canada two children are diagnosed with this devastating disease. Of the individuals with cystic fibrosis that died in 2010, half were under 26 years of age.

Cystic fibrosis takes a heavy toll on the individuals affected and their families. Canadians with this disease spend the equivalent of four months of full-time work doing life-sustaining treatments every year.

During the month of May, Cystic Fibrosis Canada is organizing many activities and events to raise awareness and funds to support vital CF research and care, and Cystic Fibrosis Canada is committed to finding a cure. Success is the only option.

1510

GO TRANSIT

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I am pleased to rise in the House today to recognize GO Transit's 45th anniversary.

As the greater Toronto-Hamilton area has grown, so have GO Transit services. From its humble beginnings as a single-line commuter rail service in 1967 from Pickering to Hamilton, GO Transit now has seven different rail lines and numerous bus routes spanning across 53 municipalities. GO Transit ridership has gone from 2.5 million riders in its first year of rail operation to approximately 57 million rail and bus riders per year, and we expect those numbers to grow.

Just this past December, GO Transit rail service was officially launched in the Kitchener-Waterloo region. That line reaches Toronto, passing through my riding of York South—Weston. This is in addition to the GO bus service that operates between Cambridge and Kitchener-Waterloo to Milton GO Station and Mississauga's Square One.

Since 2003, GO Transit has put into service new vehicles that are modern, accessible, more fuel-efficient and carry more passengers. This includes 22 double-decker buses added to the GO Transit bus fleet.

Mr. Speaker, public transit continues to be a priority for our government. We understand the need to reduce gridlock and build stronger communities.

Please join me in congratulating GO Transit for 45 years of service in the Toronto and Hamilton area.

NORTH GRENVILLE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AWARDS

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to rise today to salute the people and businesses honoured at the 24th annual North Grenville Chamber of Commerce Salute to Excellence awards. It's always great to be in North Grenville, one of the fastest-growing communities in eastern Ontario. This was another wonderful celebration of business success and community involvement.

Among the honourees was Paul Jansen, who was named the chamber's Citizen of the Year. Gerry Tallman, who unfailingly supports so many events and organization, was a very popular and deserving recipient of the Volunteer of the Year award. This year's Employer of the Year honour was taken by the Kemptville Building Centre. New Business of the Year was the eQuinelle Golf Club, which is quickly gaining a reputation as one of the finest courses in my part of the province, while Bill Osborne Chevrolet Buick GMC was chosen Established Business of the Year.

There were also Co-operative Education Student of the Year awards for Erick Trafford from North Grenville District High School and Samantha St. Pierre from St. Michael Catholic High School.

I congratulate all of those recognized, whose efforts make our communities a great place to live and work. I want to say a special thanks to Wendy Chapman, executive director, and her team, including board chair Mark Thornton, for organizing this special evening.

As the community continues to add new businesses and residents to its booming economy, there will be much more to celebrate when the chamber's Salute to Excellence marks its 25th anniversary next year.

IT'S ALL ABOUT KINDNESS DAY

Mr. David Zimmer: I rise today to acknowledge that the city of Toronto has proclaimed May 16 as It's All About Kindness Day, in honour of the late June Callwood. Ms. Callwood was a renowned activist, journalist and author. She committed her life to focusing and implementing change for many social justice issues, in particular with respect to women and children. June Callwood quickly became one of Canada's most famous social activists, founding or co-founding over 50 social action organizations. Some of her most famous organizations are Casey House, PEN Canada, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and Feminists Against Censorship. June was inducted into the Order of Canada in 1988 in recognition of these achievements.

Today the city of Toronto will be hosting numerous celebrations in memory of her. Most notably, the CN Tower will be lit in her honour.

I ask that all members of this Legislature and residents of Toronto, Ontario and indeed Canada join in the

festivities of It's All About Kindness Day in honour of the late June Callwood and her life and legacy.

VISITOR

Mr. John Yakabuski: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke on a point of order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker. I was a little tardy getting to my place today. I did want to introduce, in the members' gallery west today, Adam Bloskie, who is a graduate of the political science program at the University of Toronto and also a summer student who's going to be working for me, splitting his time between Queen's Park and the constit. He's also a hometown boy from the best place in the world, Barry's Bay.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): So that our visitor understands, it's not actually a point of order, but we let it happen because we have visitors. So thank you for doing that.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bills, without amendment:

Bill Pr1, An Act to revive Coutu Gold Mines Limited.

Bill Pr4, An Act to revive Hili Enterprises Ltd.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC SECTOR COMPENSATION FREEZE ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE GEL GLOBAL DE LA RÉMUNÉRATION DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC

Mr. Yurek moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 92, An Act to freeze compensation for two years in the public sector / Projet de loi 92, Loi visant à geler la rémunération pendant deux ans dans le secteur public.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

I believe the ayes have it.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement. I know you didn't hear because of the heckling, but it's your turn.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm pleased to stand in the House today and introduce the Comprehensive Public Sector Compensation Freeze Act. Once enacted, this legislation will apply to all public sector employees in the Ontario public service and all employees in the broader public sector under provincial control.

For a period of at least two years, this legislation will freeze all rates of pay, freeze increases and employee benefits, freeze all movements in salary grids and eliminate bonuses. Additionally, this act provides for any monies paid in contravention to the act to become a debt due to be paid back to the employer of record, namely the taxpayer.

Mr. Speaker, a comprehensive public sector wage freeze is necessary and urgently needed to control spiraling deficits. With this bill, a zero increase actually means zero. I am proud to table this necessary legislation to impose a comprehensive freeze for at least two years on all salaries and compensation paid to employees in Ontario's public sector, including myself.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will remind all members that it is the tradition to read from the explanatory note and to be brief about it.

LIQUOR LICENCE AMENDMENT ACT
(SERVING LIQUOR
IN CERTAIN PLACES), 2012
LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES PERMIS D'ALCOOL
(SERVICE D'ALCOOL
DANS CERTAINS LIEUX)

Mrs. Albanese moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 93, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act in relation to serving liquor in certain places / *Projet de loi 93, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les permis d'alcool relativement au service d'alcool dans certains lieux.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: The Liquor Licence Amendment Act (Serving Liquor in Certain Places), 2012, seeks to curb the illegal sale and service of alcohol and the operation of booze cans by giving police the tools they need to deter offenders and keep our communities safe.

1520

This act would create, if passed, a new offence whereby an individual caught illegally selling or serving alcohol would be subject to new, more stringent bail

conditions and additional penalties. This would help people feel safe on their street, on their property and in their homes.

ADDRESSING ONTARIO'S DEBT
THROUGH ALTERNATIVES
TO PUBLIC SECTOR LAYOFFS
AND PROGRAM CUTS ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 VISANT À S'ATTAQUER
À LA DETTE DE L'ONTARIO
SANS RECOURIR À DES MISES À PIED
DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC
ET À DES COMPRESSIONS
DANS LES PROGRAMMES

Mr. Barrett moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 94, An Act to address Ontario's debt through alternatives to public sector layoffs and government program cuts while reducing the fiscal pressure on the people of Ontario who are having trouble paying their bills / *Projet de loi 94, Loi visant à s'attaquer à la dette de l'Ontario sans recourir à des mises à pied dans le secteur public et à des compressions dans les programmes gouvernementaux tout en allégeant le fardeau financier des Ontariennes et Ontariens qui peinent à payer leurs factures.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Barrett moves that leave be given to introduce a bill entitled An Act to address Ontario's debt through alternatives to public sector layoffs and government program cuts while reducing the fiscal pressure on the people of Ontario who are having trouble paying their bills. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Speaker, for reading the full title.

This act amends the Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act, 1993, to allow the government to act immediately to limit increases in compensation paid to employees in the public sector, while recognizing its legal duty to consult fully with those employees and the bargaining agents representing them and to negotiate with them constructively and in good faith.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

POLICE ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO
ASSOCIATION DES POLICIERS
DE L'ONTARIO

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I rise today to pay tribute to the Police Association of Ontario and its members as we welcome them on their annual legislative day here at

Queen's Park. I would especially like to acknowledge PAO president David McFadden and chief administrative officer Ron Middel.

L'association représente plus de 34 000 agents de police et civils dans les services de police municipaux et à la Police provinciale de l'Ontario. Ce sont des hommes et des femmes qui mettent chaque jour leur vie en danger pour s'assurer que notre province demeure sûre, sécuritaire et prospère.

The Police Association of Ontario's legislative day is our opportunity to say thank you on behalf of the people of Ontario. It is also an occasion for the PAO to share with us their professional perspectives about policing in Ontario. Through these discussions, we can work together to meet the challenges we all face.

One such challenge is the future of policing in this province. In March, we convened a summit on this important subject with the active participation of the PAO, along with our other policing partners.

Ce congrès a amorcé un dialogue continu sur les défis auxquels font face les services policiers, ainsi que sur les stratégies nécessaires pour mettre en place une prestation durable des services policiers en Ontario pour le présent et pour l'avenir.

Moving forward, the ministry will be conducting a review of core police service delivery, and we will seek the expertise of the PAO, along with chiefs of police, police service boards and municipalities to complete this work. Through this review, I am confident that we will together identify new and innovative ways to manage police resources and maintain the quality of service that Ontario's communities have come to know. We appreciate the PAO's contribution to this project.

I also wish to acknowledge the PAO's guidance and advice as a key partner of this ministry in the development of province-wide policies for police services. Their participation gives us the valuable perspective of active-duty police officers in our policy deliberations.

Nos rapports avec l'association reposent sur les principes de confiance, d'ouverture et de collaboration, ces mêmes principes qui nous soutiennent pendant ces moments difficiles que passe la province. Nous remercions l'Association des policiers de l'Ontario pour son travail dévoué, pour ses commentaires honnêtes et pour le dialogue respectueux qu'elle entretient avec nous.

We will continue to do our part to ensure that our partnership thrives.

I invite all members of this House to join me in expressing our sincerest thanks to the Police Association of Ontario and its membership for helping us make Ontario a stronger and safer place in which to live, work and play.

PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Today is Personal Support Worker Day, a day when we recognize and celebrate the enormous contribution of Ontario's dedicated personal

support workers, and welcome to the gallery the personal support workers who are here.

Earlier today, it was my pleasure to meet with personal support workers here at Queen's Park and thank them in person for the tremendous support they provide to Ontarians in the home, in hospitals and in long-term care.

Yesterday, I was very pleased to join with the Premier to announce that we will be adding three million more hours of care by PSWs over the next three years, including an estimated one million hours this year. This investment is part of our budget commitment to increase funding for the home and community care sector by 4% in each of the next three years. That means an additional \$526 million annually by 2014-15. This is the right choice for our seniors, who will benefit from more home care as a result. And it's why we've made the difficult decision to freeze doctors' pay: so we can afford it.

There are an estimated 90,000 PSWs in Ontario, who perform essential services for their clients. They help with personal hygiene, light housekeeping and many, many other duties. The care PSWs provide for Ontarians cannot be overstated. They help people of all ages recover from illness, live with a chronic disease or disability, or live at home with independence and dignity as long as possible.

Last year, to foster better recognition of the work of PSWs while helping to better meet the needs of the people they care for, our government announced the creation of a registry for personal support workers. Various PSW stakeholders are currently working to implement the first phase of the registry. We expect it to be up and running by this summer.

PSWs play an especially critical role in providing services in the community, and they demonstrate a deep passion and commitment to providing exceptional care to their home care clients.

Our government recognizes the need to focus more in community and home care settings. That's why our recent budget provided a 4% increase in funding in each of the next three years for community care services.

In fact, we've steadily increased spending on community services, more than doubling it between 2003 and 2011. We've gone from \$418.7 million in 2003 to \$857.4 million in 2011. But we've done much more than simply invest dollars. We've worked collaboratively, in partnership with a broad range of stakeholders, to transform and strengthen the home care sector. I'm very pleased to say we have always enjoyed a wonderful and productive relationship with the community services sector.

So while community services remain important, the plain truth is that we must slow down our overall spending. We have to address both a looming \$15-billion deficit and the needs of a growing and aging population. Tough times demand innovative, resourceful solutions. We have to reform the way we provide services and strike the right balance. We have to put patients and clients at the centre, focus on quality and spend only on

those services and procedures that add value. That's what our action plan for health care is all about.

1530

Part of our action plan is providing access to the right care, in the right place, at the right time. This means a shift away from acute and long-term care toward more home and community care, not only because it's where people prefer to be but because home care provides the best value for our health dollars. We need to build a continuum of care in the community so that there are more options for seniors to get the care they need, and that means doing what we can to reduce institutionalization and readmission into hospitals and long-term-care homes.

Personal support workers will play a critical role in bringing the vision of the action plan to life. The health care system will rely on them to continue providing those vital services that make such a difference to people's quality of life. No matter the setting in which they work, PSWs make a tremendous contribution, not only to their clients but to the province's health care system.

I want to say a heartfelt thank you again to Ontario's dedicated personal support workers for all they do on behalf of Ontarians.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration responsible—

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —for the Pan Am Games.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'm sorry I cut you off.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I need to finish. Okay.

Hon. Charles Sousa: My apologies.

May 21 is World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, as proclaimed by the United Nations.

The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity states that connections between different cultures spark innovation and drive development. We know this to be true from our own experience here in Ontario. Ontarians come from over 200 countries, speak more than 130 languages, practise every faith and have links to all corners of the globe. In the past 50 years, Ontario has opened its doors and its heart to become a truly global village. Our province has been enriched beyond measure by the newcomers who have started new lives right here.

In addition to bringing their hopes and dreams, newcomers to Ontario bring highly valued skills that are critical to our economic prosperity. This diversity enriches our culture and is a tremendous asset for our economy.

Three of every four working-age immigrants arriving in our province have a post-secondary education. These highly skilled immigrants bring with them a wealth of skills and talents that are vital to Ontario's economic

prosperity. That's why diverse societies are more creative and more productive.

Along with sparking innovation, newcomers will be crucial in filling the gaps in our labour force as the baby boomers retire and as birth rates decline. In fact, within five years, newcomers will be responsible for all of the net growth in our labour force.

Newcomers are welcome. That's why our government invests in programs and services to help newcomers settle, become job-ready and licensed to work. It's why we're supporting the Maytree Foundation to increase the number of visible minorities in leadership positions in the GTA. It's why we support the Ontario Chamber of Commerce's Global Experience at Work program. The OCC partners with local chambers of commerce to help internationally trained professionals find jobs in their fields in and across communities in Ontario.

But we all know there's more to life than work. Every year, millions of Ontarians celebrate and support the many different traditions living among us: from Caribana and Taste of the Danforth in Toronto to the Dragon Boat Festival in Ottawa; from Carassauga in Mississauga to the Carrousel of the Nations in Windsor. We have the whole world at our doorstep to experience and enjoy.

When we share our heritage and customs, we are stronger. With this in mind, the UN has launched a global campaign called Do One Thing for Diversity and Inclusion. On this day, Ontarians are asked to support diversity. Take a walk through a different neighbourhood, visit a museum that showcases a different culture, read a book from another country or share perspectives with your friends on Facebook. Today, let's celebrate the diversity of our great province. It has enriched our society and powered our economy. It has made Ontario a beacon to the world, and it will make Ontario even stronger in the years to come. Thank you, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you for mentioning Brantford International Villages.

Responses?

POLICE ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

Mr. John Yakabuski: We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the police officers across Ontario for making our communities safer and better places to live. They work with passion and commitment, help guide our young people and work with us to build a stronger Ontario.

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus and our leader, Tim Hudak, to personally thank you for your service to the people of Ontario and to welcome you to Queen's Park.

Police officers are a valuable and essential component of our communities. They pound the pavement, patrol our neighbourhoods and respond to our calls of distress. As part of Police Week, I welcome the Police Association of Ontario here today and look forward to further discussing with them ways in which we can work collaboratively towards keeping Ontario safer for all.

Such opportunities are key to strengthening the link between the police and our citizens, by reminding us that we all work best when we work together.

Representing over 30,000 police officers and civilian members of police services from 58 associations, I look forward to the opportunity to meet with the representatives of the PAO later today. I also look forward to further discussions with the chiefs of police and the Ontario Provincial Police Association. Listening to these police organizations provides us with the first-hand, on-the-ground information we need. Their input will ensure the decisions we make here in the Legislature will indeed be in the best interests of all Ontario's citizens, and continue to make it the best place in the world to live, work and raise a family in the safe, secure environment they have provided us all along.

PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: It's a privilege to rise today on behalf of the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus as we celebrate Personal Support Worker Day across Ontario. Personal support workers embody the very best of our communities and the future of our health care system. While PSWs play a significant role in traditional care settings, your valuable work stretches beyond the hospital into schools, community centres and, of course, the home. Simply put, these dedicated, hard-working members of our health care community provide front-line care support when and where we need it.

I would say to the members, to the PSWs who are here today, it's not just the medical care and the home care services you provide; it's the emotional support that you provide that really goes above and beyond. It really makes a difference to so many people. You're often the friend, confidant and de facto navigator of our health care system, and that's what really makes a difference and plays a critical role in the recovery of patients.

So on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus and our leader, Tim Hudak, I'd like to thank each and every personal support worker from across the province for the phenomenal work that you do each and every day in our communities, and I wish you every success as you continue your noble work. Thank you very much.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm also pleased to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus, to recognize the 10th anniversary of the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. Next week, people across Canada and the world will join together to celebrate different cultural achievements and engage in important conversations of the value of diversity and inclusion.

In 2001, UNESCO took the first steps to promote our diverse cultural heritage by adopting the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. To build on that achievement, the United Nations General Assembly

passed a resolution that declared May 21 to be the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. This resolution invites all UN members to raise awareness through education and the media about the importance of cultural diversity in society.

In my job as an MPP, I've been able to witness firsthand the positive role different cultures play in strengthening our society. Since October, I've attended many cultural events in the GTA and in my riding of Kitchener-Conestoga. Each one has given me an excellent opportunity to learn about their various customs, religions and languages among Ontario's diverse population. Through these experiences I've come to realize just how much ethnic community contributes to our province and to our common identity. So I would like to invite all members of this House and all Ontarians to celebrate the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development on May 21.

1540

POLICE ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to rise today on police association day to thank members of the Police Association of Ontario, specifically some local members—Shawn McCurdy from Amherstburg, Gerald Brun from LaSalle, Chris Matis from LaSalle and Jason DeJong from Windsor—who came and visited me today on behalf of the police association to enlighten me as to some of the issues that face our police services—I'm sure everyone in the House got a brief today—some of which are:

- the facts on interest arbitration, an issue that we're all talking about and something that we have to ensure that we know some of the facts on before we make any rash decisions;

- the conducted energy weapons, more commonly known as tasers, and investigating the expansion of use of those non-lethal weapons to our police services so that they can potentially avoid some deaths in different scenarios; and

- the expansion of presumption coverage for post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, for police officers under the WSIB system. It's a shame that not only are our police officers going through this and fighting for this in Ontario, but so are men and women in our armed forces at the federal level. It's one of the biggest disgraces, that we are neglecting those men and women in our services that need that support.

PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to help celebrate Personal Support Worker Day, first by thanking Carol McDowell from SEIU Local 1, Canada, for helping to organize and bring PSWs to talk to each and every one of the members in this House.

It was rather interesting that a member from the PC Party decided to celebrate by putting a bill forward that would freeze your wages. I'm not sure this is the type of

celebration you wanted, but, you know, you come to Queen's Park, you get what you get.

Then we had the minister talking about investing in one million more hours in home care. Well, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you, the home care system in Ontario is broken. I am really happy that we will be investing in another million hours, but we're investing into a broken system.

We have a system dominated by the for-profits, that cannot recruit and retain a stable workforce. If you cannot have stability in your workforce, you cannot have quality care. Quality care is directly linked to continuity of care, and if it's different home care workers who come to your house every three or four weeks, you cannot have quality care. What happens? Those people end up in the emergency room. They end up waiting for hours. They end up in a bed in one of our hospitals, and then they're labelled "alternate level of care." None of them want to be in a hospital bed. They want to be in their home, supported by good personal support workers.

Those workers can barely do their jobs. Did you know that most of them make \$1 or \$2 above minimum wage? Did you know that they don't get paid to go from one house to the next? In my riding, the distances are huge. The average PSW will submit over 700 kilometres of travel. You know how long it takes to travel 700 kilometres on the roads in Nickel Belt? It takes a long time. They don't get paid for this. What kind of a system asks people to work and not get paid? Our home care system: It is broken.

You know how to fix the long waits in ERs? You know how to fix this ever-mounting number of people being labelled ALC and languishing in hospital beds? There's an easy fix, Mr. Speaker: Make home care jobs good jobs.

Right now you can't even recruit people to take the course for PSW because they know that they will be working for less than minimum wage. Those great women sitting there do this because they have a heart, and we owe it to them to be very proud of what they do and thank them for everything that they do. But it is still not right.

Make home care jobs good jobs, and you will go a long way toward fixing a lot of what is broken in our ERs and our hospitals, and give respect to people who, on this day and every single day, deserve the respect of this House.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Mr. Michael Prue: In the 15 seconds which I have, I'd just like to commend this wonderful opportunity for people to discover cultural diversity, particularly here in the province of Ontario. We are blessed to have people from so many places, and we need to know that cultural diversity and understanding each other's culture and each other's religion will end many conflicts before they ever have a chance to start.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration on a point of order.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I neglected to mention in my statement on cultural diversity that Brantford is also celebrating the Brantford International Villages Festival—35 years strong, Mr. Speaker. I encourage you, sir, to visit them this summer from July 4 to July 7—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Okay. Here's the test of the Speaker. Well, that's not a point of order. Even though you were trying to correct your record, you didn't say it in the first place. But that's quite all right that you've mentioned the Brantford International Villages Festival. I appreciate that.

I want to remind all of our guests on an ongoing basis: We absolutely want you to be here. We enjoy your presence here, but a subtle reminder that you cannot participate in any other displays whatsoever. Whether you like what you hear, whether you don't like what you hear, the idea is, that's the place for the House to do that. I just offer us a gentle reminder of participating in the debates.

It is now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas residents of Ontario want a moratorium on all further industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed; and

"Whereas people in Ontario living within close proximity to industrial wind turbines have reported negative health effects; we need to study the physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of wind turbines; and

"Whereas Ontario's largest farm organization, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario have called for a suspension of industrial wind turbine development until the serious shortcomings can be addressed, and the Auditor General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning; and

"Whereas there have been no third party health and environmental studies done on industrial wind turbines, and the Auditor General confirmed there was no real plan for green energy in Ontario and wind farms were constructed in haste;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Liberal government support Huron—Bruce MPP Lisa Thompson's private member's motion which calls for a moratorium on all industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed."

I support this petition, I'll affix my name and I'll send it to the clerks' desk with my friend Brady, who will only be here for two more days.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas currently the law takes the onus off of owners that raise violent dogs by making it appear that violence is a matter of genetics; and

"Whereas the Dog Owners' Liability Act does not clearly define a pit bull, nor is it enforced equally across the province, as pit bulls are not an acknowledged breed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly passes Bill 16, Public Safety Related to Dogs Statute Law Amendment Act, 2011, into law."

Yet another dog is threatened with euthanization right now as I sign this.

Of course I agree, and I'm going to give it to Safa to be delivered.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is in serious need of modernization;

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is not in harmony with all the following acts, regulations, guidelines and codes: the Occupational Health and Safety Act of Ontario, the radiation protection regulations of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, the safety codes of Health Canada and the radiation protection guidelines of the International Commission on Radiological Protection;

"Whereas dental hygienists need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by Reza Moridi, the member from Richmond Hill, that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations, make recommendations on how to modernize this act, and bring it to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I fully agree with this petition, I sign it and pass it on to page Katarina.

1550

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the closure of the Bluewater Youth Centre will have a negative economic impact on Goderich and the surrounding area; and

"Whereas there is a need to deal with overcrowding in the Ontario correctional system; and

"Whereas the federal Bill C-10, the Safe Streets and Communities Act, will increase the population in the Ontario correctional system over the next four years; and

"Whereas the Bluewater Youth Centre would need very little retrofitting and the staff would need minimal retraining to open as a medium-secure correctional facility which could hold more than 200 beds required by the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services; and

"Whereas specialized treatment programs within the correctional system such as drug treatment, mental health issues, could be offered with the skilled support staff currently in place; and

"Whereas we believe that this is the most economical way to add an additional 200 beds to the Ontario correctional system, as the building is in place and staff are currently hired to run such a facility;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government engage in meaningful community and employee consultation in order to find alternate uses within the youth services or correctional services system for this facility, thereby preventing job losses and economic hardship for an area already badly impacted by plant closures and tornado damage."

I fully support this petition, I affix my signature and I'll send it to the table with Vincent.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Michael Mantha: This petition is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario taxpayers have been paying over millions in extra charges on their hydro bills to help retire the debt. The amount collected to date as per the Auditor General's report is \$8.7 billion, but the amount owing was \$7.8 billion;

"Whereas Ontario taxpayers are asking, where is the money being invested?

"Whereas Ontario taxpayers are asking why this was not addressed at the time the debt was paid;

"Whereas electrical rates have increased with the new creation of green energy coming online to include solar and wind, refurbishment of nuclear plants and deregulation of Hydro One;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows to obtain answers to the following questions:

"How much of the debt remains?

"When will it be eliminated from Ontario taxpayers' hydro bills?"

I fully support this petition and present it to page Georgia to deliver to the clerks' table.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition from Scarborough-Agincourt, addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas recovering from injuries or illnesses at home can enhance recovery, reduce the strain on our health care system and provide comfort to patients;

"Whereas family caregivers need to focus on what matters most—providing care and support to their loved one—without the fear of losing their job;

"Whereas Ontarians who need to care for seriously ill or injured loved ones need job protection;

"Whereas the Family Caregiver Leave Act, if passed, would build on existing family medical leave to provide up to eight weeks of unpaid job leave for employees to provide care and support to a sick or injured family member;

"Whereas the PCs have pledged to vote against the bill and permanently kill the legislation;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That all parties recognize the importance of health, family, and job security by supporting the Family Caregiver Leave Act to protect the jobs of working Ontarians who need to care for seriously ill or injured loved ones."

I certainly support this petition, and affix my signature and give it to page Sarah.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas residents of Ontario want a moratorium on all further industrial wind turbine development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed; and

"Whereas people in Ontario living within close proximity to industrial wind turbines have reported negative health effects; we need to study the physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of wind turbines; and

"Whereas Ontario's largest farm organization, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario have called for a suspension of industrial wind turbine development until the serious shortcomings can be addressed, and the Auditor General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning; and

"Whereas there have been no third party health and environmental studies done on industrial wind turbines, and the Auditor General confirmed there was no real plan for green energy in Ontario and wind farms were constructed in haste;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Liberal government support Huron-Brace MPP Lisa Thompson's private member's motion which calls for a moratorium on all industrial wind turbine

development until a third party health and environmental study has been completed."

I agree with this petition, and I will put my name to it—

Mr. Bill Walker: And send it with William.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: —and I'm going to send it with William.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I have a petition from York South-Weston addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas St. John the Evangelist Catholic elementary school in Weston is overcrowded, with 480 students in a school designed for 260; and

"Whereas the students will be relocating 40 minutes away in September 2012 during the duration of the Metrolinx Weston tunnel construction; and

"Whereas the Toronto Catholic District School Board has placed St. John the Evangelist third on the urgent capital priority list for 2012;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Respectfully request full funding to replace St. John the Evangelist school during the Metrolinx Weston tunnel construction; therefore, the students are not relocated twice."

I agree with this petition, will sign it and hand it over to page Safa.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Jim McDonell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas a report from Ontario's Auditor General on the province's air ambulance service, Ornge, found a web of questionable financial deals where tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars have been wasted and public safety compromised;

"Whereas Ornge officials created a 'mini-conglomerate' of more than a dozen private entities that enriched former senior officers and left taxpayers on the hook for \$300 million in debt;

"Whereas government funding for Ornge climbed 20% to \$700 million, while the number of patients airlifted actually declined by 6%;

"Whereas Ornge was paid \$7,700 per patient transported by land ambulance despite subcontracting this service for \$1,700 per patient, a full \$6,000 per patient less;

"Whereas, after receiving questions of serious concerns at Ornge from the opposition in 2010 and early 2011, the Minister of Health did not provide adequate oversight, ignored the red flags and reassured the Legislature that all was well; and

"Whereas, on March 21, 2012, the Legislature voted to create a special all-party select committee to investigate the scandals surrounding Ornge;

"Whereas such a committee provides protection from disciplinary action against employees who testify;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government of Ontario immediately appoint a special all-party select committee to investigate the scandals surrounding Ornge."

I agree with this petition, will be signing it and handing it off to page Jenny.

SERVICES DIAGNOSTIQUES

M. Michael Mantha: À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que l'Ontario fait de la tomographie par émission de positons (TEP) un service de santé assuré par le régime public pour les patients atteints du cancer et de maladies cardiaques, lorsque les données cliniques indiquent que cette technique est efficace dans leur cas; et

« Attendu que d'ici octobre 2009, des TEP assurées seront effectuées à Ottawa, à London, à Toronto, à Hamilton ainsi qu'à Thunder Bay; et

« Attendu que la ville du Grand Sudbury est une plaque tournante pour la santé dans le Nord-Est, qui compte l'Hôpital régional de Sudbury et son programme régional de cancer, de même que l'École de médecine du Nord de l'Ontario;

« Nous, soussignés, demandons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario d'offrir de la TEP par le biais de l'Hôpital régional de Sudbury, donnant ainsi un accès équitable aux résidents du Nord-Est de l'Ontario. »

Je suis complètement d'accord avec cette pétition, monsieur le Président, et je la présente à page Sarah pour la délivrer aux clerks.

RADON

Mr. Reza Moridi: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas radon is an inert gas formed by the radioactive decay of uranium-238, which is present in rocks and soils in the earth's crust;

"Whereas there have been many studies linking radon gas as a cancer-causing agent;

"Whereas studies have covered various aspects of radon exposure as a prevalent carcinogen in various locations, the most predominant locations being workplaces and residential homes; and

"Whereas currently there is no regulation in Ontario that governs what is an acceptable level of radon in a public and/or private dwelling;

1600

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To support private member's Bill 36, introduced by Reza Moridi, MPP, Richmond Hill, on February 23, 2012, which would enact the Radon Awareness and

Prevention Act, 2012, and amend the Building Code Act, 1992, with respect to radon."

I fully agree with this petition and sign it and pass it on to page William.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I have a petition to present on behalf of some residents in my riding.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Bill 13 is unnecessary as an anti-bullying measure because Ontarians already have Bill 157; and

"Whereas Bill 13 promotes radical revisions to school instruction on sex and gender that a majority of parents do not support; and

"Whereas Bill 13 fails to provide any protection for students of faith or students of distinct physical characteristics;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To vote against Bill 13 or to so amend Bill 13 as to equally protect all students, including students of faith."

I'll send this with a page.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas currently the law takes the onus off of owners that raise violent dogs by making it appear that violence is a matter of genetics; and

"Whereas the Dog Owners' Liability Act does not clearly define a pit bull, nor is it enforced equally across the province, as pit bulls are not an acknowledged breed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly passes Bill 16, Public Safety Related to Dogs Statute Law Amendment Act, 2011, into law."

Already, 1,000 dogs have been killed. I want to prevent any more death.

I'm going to sign this and give this to Vincent to be delivered to the table.

MARKDALE HOSPITAL

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Grey Bruce Health Services' Markdale hospital is the only health care facility between Owen Sound and Orangeville on the Highway 10 corridor;

"Whereas the community of Markdale rallied to raise \$13 million on the promise they would get a new state-of-the-art hospital in Markdale;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care announce as soon as possible its intended construction date for the new Markdale hospital and ensure that the

care needs of the patients and families of our community are met in a timely manner.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name and send it with Sarah to the clerks’ desk.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I have another petition from residents of York South–Weston.

“Whereas St. John the Evangelist Catholic elementary school in Weston is overcrowded, with 480 students in a school designed for 260; and

“Whereas the students will be relocating 40 minutes away in September 2012 during the duration of the Metrolinx Weston tunnel construction; and

“Whereas the Toronto Catholic District School Board has placed St. John the Evangelist third on the urgent capital priority list for 2012;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Respectfully request full funding to replace St. John the Evangelist school during the Metrolinx Weston tunnel construction; therefore, the students are not relocated twice.”

I will sign this and hand it over to page Vincent.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim McDonell: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas industrial wind turbine developments have raised concerns among citizens over health, safety and property values; and

“Whereas the Green Energy Act allows wind turbine developments to bypass meaningful public input and municipal approvals;

“Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of the Environment revise the Green Energy Act to allow full public input and municipal approvals on all industrial wind farm developments; and

“That the Minister of the Environment conduct a thorough scientific study on the health and environmental impacts of industrial wind turbines.”

I agree with the petition and will be signing it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONG ACTION FOR ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR UNE ACTION ÉNERGIQUE POUR L'ONTARIO (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 15, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / *Projet de loi 55, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member from Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. John Milloy: Oh, come on.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —and thank you very much to the government House leader. I know he always loves when I get up to speak.

In seriousness, however, I think each member finds that the moment that they are able to debate the budget of any given year is an extremely humbling experience. It was one when I first made my speech in this esteemed chamber as a member back in 2006, and I’ve taken that task each and every year very seriously. I review the budget based on the values, the ideals and the dreams of my constituents. In recent years, however, it has been also the plight of my constituents, as we’ve seen our economy flounder. Here I am today, with the views and the aspirations of my constituents that I choose to bring to the floor today on this budget.

Speaker, we are in a situation where this province is losing jobs, almost tens of thousands by the month. We are in one of the most high-tax regimes we’ve seen, as I alluded to earlier today, in a position of having seen the highest sales tax increase in our province’s history as a result of the HST that came in in 2010–11.

We know that they brought in the health premium, which is actually a tax, back in 2004. That was, at the time, the largest income tax increase in this province’s history.

We know, through this government’s green energy plan, that we are subsidizing green power off the backs of middle-class families, seniors on a fixed income and small businesses that are struggling to create those jobs we need for a full economic recovery.

We know that in rural communities, which I am proud to represent, we are being hard hit, not only by a budget that doesn’t represent them but by an attack on rural values as it pertains to the horse racing industry. There are real stories, real consequences, as a result of this government’s action or, in some cases, lack thereof.

There are stories of people you visit, whom you talk to, who share their problems, who share what they hope could happen. You see, for many years Ontario was the leader in Confederation. We had the best, the most robust, the most optimistic economy. People came here from around the world. They came here from other provinces, and I should know, as does my colleague from Welland. We came here from a little province called Nova Scotia.

This was the place where you could realize that dream of having a full-time job. It was the place where you could realize the dream of home ownership. It was the place where you could realize the dream of growing your

family. That's the province that I came to—the economic engine of Confederation.

Unfortunately, with our high taxes and this government's lack of focus on government spending, we see a very different Ontario today, one that is lagging in economic growth behind the Prairies, and Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island at times. We have significant challenges in this province, and the people I represent feel it every single day. They know, for example, that every single dollar they send to Queen's Park is not being spent wisely.

They've heard over the years—and my goodness, Speaker, they are some angry—about the waste and mismanagement at eHealth. That's a billion-dollar boondoggle. At the time, we thought it couldn't get any worse. In fact, this government brought in legislation and promised it wouldn't. But then it did, Speaker. We ended up with Ornge. We don't even know the true rot; we don't know the true loss of public dollars to that massive scandal. We've been asking for months now for a select committee to find out where people's taxpayer dollars are in this province.

Speaker, I want to talk directly about how this impacts the people I represent. We have personal care workers here today. Let me tell you a story. Mr. Duncan, the finance minister, stood before this House on budget day and he told us that the third-largest spending priority of his government is the debt and the deficit. We are in massive deficit, and our debt has tripled since they've taken office. What does this mean, Mr. Speaker? In Mr. Duncan's own words—let me paraphrase—every single dollar taken away from health care and education goes toward the budget. More effectively, let me say it this way: Every single dollar we spend on interest to foreign banks is a dollar less spent here in Ontario, in our hospitals and in our education sector front lines, in our schools. Let us also put this into perspective: We spend more servicing the debt and the deficit than we do on every other government department combined outside of education and health care. That's what this government has done.

Let me say this, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to talk about a brief meeting I had at the home of one of my constituents in a small rural village in the city of Ottawa. They live in a trailer park; not a lot of insulation in their home. Their water quality is poor. I've been on the case in Lynnwood trailer park for a long time. I dropped by this family's house just before Christmas. I wanted to say thank you to them for all the things they had done for me over the year. When we got talking about Facebook, I said to them, "Just log in right now."

They looked at me across their kitchen table and they said, "We can't. We can't afford to turn on our computer during the day. You'll notice we don't have any lights on during the day either." And then they further told me that they don't put their heat on during the day. Thankfully, that was a mild day.

We have people who are being forced to choose between heating and eating in this province because this

government has levelled a tax burden on them that is simply unsustainable. Then they look back at this government spending all that money on the debt and deficit because they haven't been able to control it. We look at them spending money on Ornge and at eHealth, and they can't understand it. They can't fathom that Chris Mazza was making \$1.5 million, when \$500,000 would be more than every trailer in that park. I must say that it shocks me.

And then I speak to my constituents who are in the horse racing industry, at Rideau Carleton Raceway. Speaker, it would make you cry. I want to tell you the story of Ricky Sullivan, who I spent some time with in the last two weeks. Ricky Sullivan would break your heart. This is what he told the Manotick Messenger when I was with him: "I'm almost 50. I have cancer, I have sclerosis of the liver and I'm looking at losing everything." Sullivan owns a farm and a training centre on Stagecoach Road. I'm proud to say it's in Nepean—Carleton. He has 60 horses, three barns, a training facility and a track on his farm. The end of the slots-at-racetracks program, he says, will wipe him out. Let me read his quote to you: "When you hear something like this, at first you don't believe it. But it's real. My little farm is not going to survive this. We're going to lose everything, and then we have about a dozen people working there that are going to be out of jobs. My hydro bills are about \$1,000 to \$1,100 a month, and insurance on our farm is about \$8,000 to \$10,000 a year. We won't be able to afford either. We're screwed." That's what this government has done to my constituents.

I'm ashamed that they have gone ahead with this budget without consulting the very people that they are going to put out of business and, in some cases, put out of house and home. And they're not alone; it's the small businesses; it's my constituent who owns the electricity store in Bells Corners who says his heating bill alone will force him not to be able to hire summer students this year.

Mr. Speaker, on the backdrop of this is Ornge, and we've been calling for a public inquiry into this. We've been asking for a select committee. This government has refused, and that's why I, right now, will call for adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Ms. MacLeod has called for adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

I believe the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1614 to 1644.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Ms. MacLeod has moved adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour will please stand and be counted by the Clerk.

All those opposed, please stand.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 19; the nays are 34.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The motion is defeated. Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I call for adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Ms. Macleod has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear nays.

All those in favour will say "yea."

All those opposed will say "nay."

I believe the nays have it.

Please call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1646 to 1716.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Order. Members, please take your seats.

Ms. MacLeod has moved adjournment of the House.

All those in favour, please stand and be counted by the clerks.

All those opposed, please stand.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 18; the nays are 34.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I declare the motion defeated.

Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Sorry. Questions and comments? I'm sorry, I didn't hear you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I said thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to debate.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Are you talking—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay, the NDP is not up. The member from Huron—Bruce, then.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate today on Bill 55, Ontario's budget bill—

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm doing the hit on you? You know what? I'm also pleased to speak on the comments by the honourable member from Nepean—Carleton, because she has done such a great job elocuting the fact that this bill does absolutely nothing to build an affordable Ontario for Ontarians, as they've been calling out.

Our member from Nepean—Carleton demonstrated, example after example, how local people in her riding are being impacted. The fact that they've had to choose whether they're going to pay their electricity bill or their food bill is just staggering. As she very eloquently pointed out, she was hopeful in her move to Ontario, which she thought was the economic engine of Confederation, and sadly enough today we're at the back of the train. We're no longer the engine. I don't even know if we're attached to the caboose at this stage of the game. It's just a sad state of affairs.

We need a government in Ontario that's prepared to take bold steps and do the right thing by the good people of Ontario and demonstrate that they matter, that we understand what it's like, that we need to have money left over in our pockets at the end of the day for those special little things for families and communities. We have also

realized, through comments earlier today, that Ontario is no longer the economic engine of Confederation. Sad to say, some folks from Brock, Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes— you can say it the other way around as well—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much. There are some folks there who think this province of Ontario has become very mean, and that's sad. We need to restore prosperity in this province. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions or comments? The member from Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the member from Nepean—Carleton for her remarks earlier today before the bells.

There are people hurting all over this province. I had the opportunity on Saturday to actually attend an event with ACORN, which is a community housing advocate group that has 23,000 members here in Ontario. They talked about falling behind, about paying 70% to 80%, some of them, in rent from their income. The vast majority of their members certainly are paying more than the guideline of 35% or 40%. They're disappointed that there's nothing in this budget for new housing initiatives, for new affordable housing for low-, modest- and medium-income people in the province of Ontario. The Liberals committed to a long-term strategy, but they have not put any targets or controls to that initiative. So these people are feeling kind of left out in this process. They would have loved to have been able to come and make a presentation if we had had public hearings on the budget prior to the budget speech and the budget bill being presented. They would have told you that we need some full rent controls in this province; we need some landlord licensing. Many of these people are living in buildings that are in great disrepair. Now we hear that there are municipal powers in place, but in fact many of the landlords in this province are actually paying the fines instead of doing the repairs because it's cheaper.

One gentleman who I talked to said the elevator was broken in his 20-storey building for a period of more than two years. He received no compensation for having to travel up I don't know how many flights of stairs to actually bring groceries into his apartment.

So there are many more things that need to be done for Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I did listen to the comments from my colleague from Nepean—Carleton.

I want to just tell those people in Peterborough riding, just before they sit down for dinner this evening—they're probably just tuning in, so I want to give them a bit of a scorecard here. Of late, we've had 45 bells in the Ontario Legislature. We've had over 13 hours of debate on Bill 55.

When I was talking to my constituents last Friday, they were telling me they want Bill 11 passed; that's the enshrinement of EODF that helps eastern Ontario, my part of Ontario. They want the healthy homes renovation

tax credit brought into being to help out those seniors. I met a number of schoolchildren who are very anxious to see Bill 13 enshrined—the anti-bullying legislation—to help out some of our most vulnerable children in our schools. We want to see that in place by the start of the new school year in September.

So that's what they're telling me when I have those great conversations with people at the East City Coffee Shop—a great spot to go. You get to see a broad cross-section of Peterborough there. That's what they told me last Friday. Healthy homes renovation tax credit—they want it passed. Bill 11, EODF—they want that passed.

If you want to talk about meanness, I'll tell you about meanness. From 1995 to 2003, what happened? The minimum wage was frozen for eight long years in the province of Ontario. The first act of their government in 1995: Slash the rates of people who were on ODSP and OW by 21%. Anybody who has been involved in the poverty reduction strategy in the province of Ontario would tell you the poverty spiral started in 1995, when those two draconian measures were taken which hurt, hurt, hurt some of our most vulnerable citizens in the province of Ontario. You want to talk about meanness? I'll tell you about meanness. They define meanness in the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to rise and comment on the factual words that my colleague from Nepean–Carleton brought about Bill 55, Strong Action—that's a little bit of a misnomer, but we won't go there right now.

I want to make sure that I do compliment her, though. She moved here from Nova Scotia to what she suggested was the economic engine of our Confederation. Their loss is our certain gain, and in our PC caucus it is definitely a gain for us.

But I ask the question, if she was making that decision on behalf of her family today, would she move to Ontario? I think not. Why would she come to a province that has more debt and the largest deficit in Confederation? No jobs—600,000 people out of jobs and no prospect for the next generation, Speaker.

She brought really good words about the people in her riding and how they're struggling; it's unfortunate that they're struggling. They are leaving their lights off in the middle of the daytime because they cannot afford those hydro bills, those hydro bills that have gone up 46% as a result of this very inane Green Energy Act—very poorly thought out. There's no jobs. There's no economic benefit to this. In fact, it's driving people out of our economy and out of our province at record numbers.

This government, in this budget—the deficit is \$15.3 billion more than they're taking in, and they're spending, and yet they still added—14 out of 24 ministries are going to have increased budgets. It's ludicrous. We just can't continue—they've doubled the debt in eight years. It took the rest of our time as a province to get to this debt level, and they've doubled it in eight years.

The third-largest expense, she explained, is servicing the debt. Just think, with regard to the PSW workers who were here today, how much care we could give to those people in need across our great province if we weren't spending the third-largest expenditure on financing the deficit that they have drummed up in eight years.

Speaker, we need them to pull back spending. We wanted a jobs plan to get those 600,000 people working. We wanted them to pay down debt. They didn't, so we cannot support Bill 55.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Nepean–Carleton has two minutes.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I would like to, first, thank those who engaged in debate with me today, the member from Huron–Bruce and the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I must say their passion has been here since they joined this Legislature. They are a wonderful addition to our Progressive Conservative caucus.

To my colleague from Welland, I appreciated her kind views of the people that she represents. Keep doing that. It will hold you in good stead the remainder of the time you are here at Queen's Park.

To my friend from Peterborough, whom I do consider to be a good adversary—however, he is wrong. If he would like to talk about scores and settling the scores, I can tell him. He can talk about 45 bells, Speaker; I can only talk about two deaths in the last week that were caused as a result of the mismanagement at Ornge. That is why we are ringing those bells. We want justice for patients who need to go on air transport here in this province to go from community to community.

I can tell you something, Speaker. I was listening to Newstalk 1010 today. They were talking about the need for Deb Matthews to resign as a result of what happened at Ornge. That is why we are ringing the bells. We want a select committee, we want that minister to resign and we want justice at Ornge. We want to know where that money has been spent.

We are facing a catastrophic debt in Ontario. If they do not take strong action, which they are not prepared to do, we will face a \$30-billion deficit in this province and a \$440-billion debt. Every single dollar being spent to service our debt is a dollar taken away from health care and education. I ask the honourable member, do you think the school in your community that is being forced for closure right now, in Peterborough, would be forced for closure if we weren't spending so much to service the debt and the deficit if you took that strong action? I ask that member.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I rise today to talk about Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to amend various Acts. It's a very large document. It's 327 pages long. It is surely not the one-pager that we were talking about this morning, which brings me concerns, because this is a very, very large document. There are a lot of hidden and concerning articles in there and changes and amendments that I'm going to try to highlight today, but

obviously I will not have all the time that I need in the 10 minutes that I'm awarded today.

When I was campaigning last fall in Algoma-Manitoulin, people made it clear to me that they wanted to see changes, and the change they wanted to see is representation in our riding, first and foremost, right down to here in Queen's Park. I'm happy to be here, talking on their behalf. It's my privilege to be here talking on their behalf.

We saw what Ontarians wanted. They elected a minority government, one in which we all must work together in the best interests of all Ontarians, something that this government had not considered doing for many, many years. Then we were confronted with the proposed budget this spring, and in our opinion, it was unsuccessful at finding that balance between austerity and job creation. While we acknowledge the need to tighten spending, we also need to explore and develop new sources of revenue. This budget did not accomplish that. We knew that the weight of balancing the books would fall on the average Ontarian, and those who could afford to contribute a little more got off scot-free.

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New Democrats were faced with a decision to reject this unfair budget or to work with Ontarians and other parties and listen to their needs and get real results for them, and that's what we did. We listened to thousands of Ontarians. I spoke to my constituents in Algoma-Manitoulin and brought back their concerns to this Legislature and to our caucus.

Communities across the north have been hit hard with job losses. We have had thousands of jobs lost in the forestry sectors, with mill downsizing and closures left, right and centre. We have folks losing their jobs in the ONTC; again, northerners taking the hit to balance the books. We have an abundance of resources in the north, but we will ship the raw materials out of this province and into another country to be processed. This is a great job creation program if you live in China, but I fail to see how it benefits and delivers jobs to everyday Ontarians.

Even with the recent welcome announcement of the smelter in Capreol, the government has not been forthcoming in any agreements they may have with Cliffs Natural Resources on how much processing will be done out of the country. Again, why are jobs being shipped outside of our country? This is not a well-thought-out plan; this is not a creation plan, if you ask me.

We have the right, in front of us, and the ability to create real opportunities, good jobs, in an attainable economic prosperity plan for the north. Let's make it work for us here in the north. Let Ontarians benefit from our province's resources. This is a win-win situation that shouldn't be passed up.

Within this budget, I have been expressing issues that we are encountering with potential losses of ServiceOntario, services in northern and rural communities. Many small family-run businesses are already experiencing cutbacks on top-ups which made these businesses and services available to operate and provide these

services to a much-needed area of northern Ontario. There just isn't a demand in many of these rural communities, given the smaller population sizes. Therefore, they are not able to meet the break-even point.

Ontarians living in the north are already experiencing potential losses of services, and a privatization of these services would only worsen. Automated counters being installed in the stores to issue such things as licences for fishing will create even more problems. Let me give you an example. A lot of these businesses in northern Ontario which will have these so-called service counters will have individuals who will come in and have an automated application service for a fishing licence or a hunting licence. Well, they normally don't come alone. They come in a group of four, five, sometimes six. They will be standing at these kiosks, and apparently, from the information that has been relayed to us, they will be standing there 27 minutes at a time in order to get these licences for them to go and enjoy the outdoors that we have here. Well, 27 minutes times four, five, six individuals—I don't have to explain to you how frustrated they will be. And you know what? The economic opportunities that are there, that are slimly there, are going to be lost.

As many of you know, these kiosks and staff have a problem working in these close proximities. They are not even in our country—that's where they're coming from, which raises further questions about accountability and where this information is going to be stored. It's stored in Tennessee—Tennessee, USA. That's not even in Canada.

Mr. John Vanthof: Home of Jack Daniels.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Home of Jack Daniels, as my colleague says here.

We have already limited services. Privatization of these services almost never makes better services. Privatization could mean that businesses will operate for profit, and this is where the services are going to be lost. The objective of providing the services, essential services, to communities is going to be lost. It's not only difficult to conclude that rural areas which are not going to bring in the cash will not operate very long, again leaving those living in rural areas with no access to these services; also, installing automated machines which are serviced in the USA is doing nothing to create jobs in Ontario. If the government enters into the agreement with potential private, for-profit companies in allowing the private sector to perform services which should be managed by the province, we are guaranteed to see another Ornge. This weakness of this legislation is worrisome. We could see fees increase for public services because the legislation, or weakness of it, allows them to do so.

ServiceOntario is not a company which is under-utilized; millions of Ontarians are dependent on it for services that are essential and unavoidable. With the 48 million expected transactions this year in over 80 services, including health card renewals, drivers' and vehicle services, birth, marriage and death certificates and so on, this is not a service we should be privatizing. The government needs to be accountable for these services and the privacy of the clients.

Again, I will reiterate my concern specifically for northern and rural communities. I just have a hard time imagining a for-profit company actually profiting in these less-populated areas, begging the question: Will they operate there at all?

You know, there are other concerns in this bill, like the weakening of the environmental legislation. There are many things that are hidden in this bill that will really bring concern to my constituents. Many of them have been heavily involved in environmental protection initiatives so that their children and their children to come can also enjoy the beauty that is available in northern Ontario. Unbelievably, this bill has threatened much of what we have fought hard to protect and is now being endangered. What has alarmed many in my riding is the fact that this bill implements new exemptions to habitat and species protection under the Endangered Species Act, therefore furthering the risk to endangered species on private lands by removing the protection under the ESA.

I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but I'm just going to have to go through; I have much to say but I only have 40 seconds left.

When it comes to health care, the north has always been at the losing end. I'm constantly dealing with the loss of services in small hospitals and clinics, the lack of medical professionals in the north, and the far distances to travel and seek medical attention on dangerous roads. It is clear that northern and rural health care was not a priority for this government.

In conclusion, this is a large document. There are many things in here that I have not even been able to touch on. I have highlighted a few, and only a few, but at the end of the day it is pretty evident that this government failed to produce a budget that would effectively decrease the deficit while creating new sources of revenue for a real job creation plan in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member for Pickering–Scarborough East.

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very proud of the Ontario budget that we have put forward. It is a budget that's very focused on eliminating the deficit, as we all know. We need to again look at the facts here. Our province has been plagued with a deficit for most of the last 20 years by many different governments. So let's jointly acknowledge that; let's jointly own that problem.

However, we are committed to eliminating the deficit by 2017-18, and we're doing that not just because it's the financially responsible thing to do but because, quite frankly, the deficit is the biggest threat to health care, education and social services in this province of Ontario. We know how to fix this, and that is our plan, to do so.

In my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East, I get questions about the tuition reduction program: Are we going to continue that? I say, "Yes, if the budget is passed." I get questions about improved health care. I say, "Yes. Look at our health action plan and the shifts

we want to make to make sure that we provide the right health care, in the right place, at the right time, for the right price." We have questions in my office about jobs, the economy, transit, the 407 extension, which affects not just my riding but all of Durham region and parts of Toronto as well.

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Last, but not least, our budget is very focused on protecting our most vulnerable citizens in our province: children and youth, our seniors—our seniors who deserve to stay at home as long as they can, as long as they are able and want to. We need to respect the seniors who built our province and we need to support our youth. We need to continue to lift children out of poverty. We need to continue to make the investments we've made in terms of social assistance. Our budget is very much about providing those protections to our most vulnerable citizens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: This Bill 55, this budget, is just too expensive. The Liberal government has demonstrated they don't understand that we're in serious financial shape. They don't seem to read the papers about what's happening in Greece, in Spain, in Italy. They're just not paying attention to the realities of what's going on in the world and in Ontario here today.

They call the budget an austere measure. In fact, it is anything but. They're saying that it's a tough budget and it is anything but tough. Our debt is \$240 billion and growing. We have a deficit of \$15 billion; that has not changed. They're going to spend \$200 billion more. So it's an increased-spending budget.

They don't listen to the Drummond report or the Auditor General. They're telling us that we shouldn't be doing—Mr. Drummond said that there were 362 recommendations of ways to cut back and change programs to save money and try to balance the budget.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Almost half were actually adopted.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Good; glad to hear it. The other half should have been adopted, too. That's what Mr. Drummond said.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'm glad everyone's ignoring me. I think the cross-dialogue can stop and the member will not do cross-dialogue with people. He'll go through me. I think we're getting a little loud on the government side, so I'd appreciate it, if you have a problem, take it outside. Thank you.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sorry for that.

Mr. Drummond mentioned that we should not go ahead with junior kindergarten because it costs \$1.5 billion. We can't afford it. The Auditor General said that there was no serious feasibility study on the Green Energy Act. That's going to cost us tens of millions of dollars over the next 20 years.

We should have a wage freeze, and they haven't done that. All public servants should have a wage freeze. It's not an option; it's a necessity.

We need to address the trades. We need to reduce the apprenticeship ratio from 3 to 1 to 1 to 1.

Interjections.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: You're not supposed to talk to me. I'm talking to the Chair.

Standard and Poor's has downgraded our rating from stable to negative. Moody's downgraded—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour to actually respond to my honourable colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin. He spent a lot of time talking about privatization, and we've seen the results of attempts at government privatization. Ornge is one of them.

But some people don't understand about privatization of government services. As a small businessman, when I risk my own money for profit, that's a good thing. That's how you create jobs. But when governments try to privatize things like hydro, people are risking the public's money for their own profit, and that's a whole different story.

Something else: When you privatize government services, like fishing licences processed in Tennessee—right? The service is in Ontario—it's supposed to be. It's a government service, and no one thinks that the money that is actually going to Tennessee—and, even worse, the records are going to Tennessee. Those records are under the laws of Tennessee, not Ontario.

Something else about privatization—that's really bad about privatization—I heard this morning that we're really proud there are more trains in southern Ontario, which are privatized, which are subsidized. But in northern Ontario, we can't subsidize anymore, so you have two different levels of service.

The member from Algoma-Manitoulin mentioned that there will be areas with ServiceOntario, once it's privatized, that won't have Service Tennessee, because the people in Tennessee won't bother doing it. So we'll be living in Ontario—nice Ontario flag—but we won't be serviced by formerly ServiceOntario; it'll be Service Tennessee. I'm being a little bit flippant about it, but it's a really serious problem, because once you go down the privatization road, you are no longer treating everyone equally.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to be given an opportunity to respond to my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin and my good friend and colleague from Pickering-Scarborough East.

The single most important issue that our government is taking on is the issue of the economy and how we balance the budget by 2017. At the end of the day, that's what the people of Ontario want and that's what people asked us to do.

So let me remind my colleague across about the concern he has about northern Ontario and what the government hasn't done for him. Let me remind him of the northern Ontario heritage fund that continues to build success for the communities in northern Ontario, supporting over 4,400 projects, levying over \$2.4 billion—billion dollars, not million—in additional contribution to the northern economy. And last week—you know that Cliff Resources is going to bring in new resources and new economic opportunity for your northern community. The northern Ontario heritage fund creates and is also sustaining over 17,000 direct jobs.

So to say that our government has not addressed it—yes, of course we could do more. But at the end of the day, you also have to express concern about the whole issue of health care and medical spaces. Let me remind you, it was this government that built a medical school up north. So that's not small change there. We ensured health care access is there through medical training.

I want to remind my colleague opposite that it is also your government back in the 1990s that closed off medical school spaces by 13%. I was a young nurse at that time; I remember that—very crazy. I also remember that your government, the NDP government, cut nurses—fell by 3,000; okay? So as a former public health nurse, I could tell you the pain and the suffering of my colleagues and the families—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Algoma-Manitoulin has a two-minute response.

Mr. Michael Mantha: To the members from Pickering-Scarborough East, Carleton-Mississippi Mills, Timiskaming-Cochrane and to the member from Scarborough-Agincourt, thank you all for your comments. They're much appreciated.

To the member from Scarborough-Agincourt, I'm really happy to hear that your government can do more when it comes to the resources and how they're going to be developed in Ontario. I look forward to hearing those ideas, because we really do have to do more with our resources here in Ontario and not let them leave the province without benefiting each and every Ontarian as much as we possibly can.

In regard to health care, it was quite evident with what this government has proposed that health care wasn't a priority; it wasn't even on the radar in your budget. It was because of the New Democrats and what we had done and the discussions that we had actually put forward that we were able to get \$20 million included for small northern and rural hospitals in northern Ontario. Let's not forget that important point.

Also, it was because of the NDP that we were able to get some type of movement from this government—which I look forward to—under your jobs and prosperity plan so that you will actually look at one of our platform ideas in regard to bringing good jobs and bringing some of the benefits that we proposed, through our proposal through the job credit creation plan, that we have in our plan. That's really good; I like hearing that, where you're actually listening. That's good. You're actually listening.

Where this government has also failed for Ontarians is that we need to make this budget fairer for everybody—which, I have to say, the NDP was quite successful in getting it done—regardless of your age, gender, ability or your economic situation. We need to make sure that there is much, much, much more. Let's not kid ourselves. There is a lot more that we can do in this budget in order to build it, to make it fairer and to make it inclusive for all Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Hon. John Milloy: It's a great pleasure to stand here today and speak about Bill 55, the budget implementation bill. This bill, of course, incorporates the technical and the legislative changes that are needed to accompany the budget that was put forward some, I think, six or seven weeks ago, a budget that I think we recognize reflects the times—the times that are a time of restraint—where governments across the world are coming to terms with record high deficits that were brought about due to a global recession.

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What I'm most proud about our government is that it tackled the issue of restraint and tackled the issue of reducing the deficit over a time frame—the same time frame that has been accepted by all parties—and it did it in a way which is, if I can use the term, a Liberal way, a middle-of-the-road way, which represents the sort of balance and restraint that our government is known for. On the one hand, we've looked at government spending and we found ways to reduce government spending, in some instances to cut government spending, while at the same time working to ensure that the strides, that the progress that we made in a number of key areas is not hampered.

Those key areas—there's three of them. The first is health care. I'm very proud that we continue to invest more in health care and, again, to build on the successes of the last nine years. Are we going to be able to put as much into health care as we have in the past? No, Mr. Speaker. So how are going to deal with that? We're going to deal with it through transformation, through working with the system and making sure that our health care dollars are dealt with in the most productive way possible.

Then we come to the area of education—again, one of the few areas where we're making significant investments in order to make sure that the benefit that we've seen over the past number of years is not lost.

I was very interested to hear, a moment ago, our colleague from Carleton-Mississippi Mills, who stood up and said, "We should adopt the Drummond report when it comes to full-day kindergarten." We rejected that on this side of the House because we recognize the importance of education, not only in terms of the immediate good in terms of the children—

Interjections.

Hon. John Milloy: —but, as my colleagues are saying here, in terms of an investment.

It was interesting. I was meeting with a group of teachers the other day, school board trustees and teachers in my riding, and they said to me that—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon. John Milloy: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. They're so enthusiastic about my speech on my side of the House.

Do you know what they were telling me, Mr. Speaker? This group of educators, teachers, school board trustees and others were saying that the most successful educational program they had ever seen is full-day learning. It was helping to prepare our young people, these children, as they move forward, to prepare them for grade 1, grade 2, grade 3 and onwards up through the system. They were giving them the skills and the outlook that was needed. At the same time, as we know, full-day learning has an extension aspect to it, the idea of full-day programming. In my community—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Well, it seems that we have a lot of exuberance in the hall today. I can't even hear your speaker because the minister's talking over him across the floor. Thank you very much. We would appreciate it if you would cut that back.

The member from Oxford is rather rambunctious. I would suggest he cut it, and the two gentlemen at the back who are doing a few catcalls—we'd appreciate it if you could be quiet, too. Thank you very much. Let's have a nice end to this day.

Go ahead, government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased to be talking about the unbelievable comment, from the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills, that we should have accepted the Drummond report recommendation on full-day learning. In fact, what I found very, very strange was that he stood up and said that we should have adopted all of the Drummond report, holus-bolus. But at the same time, if I recall the Drummond report correctly, it said that we should have gotten rid of the subsidy for horse racing, which we're doing. So I'm very interested that, on the one hand, the member wants to get rid of full-day learning, but he is on record, and his party is on record, to maintain the subsidy for horse racing. I think it's great to know that that's where we have the Progressive Conservative values, that it's okay to subsidize horse racing, but it's not okay to subsidize full-day learning in this province.

Full-day learning builds on other work that we've done in terms of maintaining smaller class sizes, and in terms of the 30% tuition grant when it comes to post-secondary education.

Again, it was a tough budget, but we wanted to maintain the progress we have made in terms of education. At the same time, does that mean it's a status quo situation? No. Just as in health care, we're going to be looking at transformation and ways that we can make these very, very valuable tax dollars stretch further.

The third area, Mr. Speaker, and one that I'm particularly proud of as Minister of Community and Social Services, where we are going to be making additional investments, is in the whole area of what is called in the budget the social service cluster, or social service area—my area as Minister of Community and Social Services and that of the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Again, we recognize, particularly during these tough economic times, that we have to make sure that we are reaching out and supporting those who are the most vulnerable in our society—and obviously, with my colleague the Minister of Children and Youth Services, a special emphasis on children and making sure that children are raised out of poverty and that they get the head start they need.

Again, does that mean that the status quo will be maintained? Of course not. The budget builds upon, and anticipates, some of the good work that is being done right now by Frances Lankin and Munir Sheikh, two outstanding individuals, one a former member of this Legislature. Both of them are undertaking one of the most comprehensive reviews of social assistance in decades, Mr. Speaker, and we look forward—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Isn't that the guy that Harper fired?

Hon. John Milloy: Yes. Munir Sheikh, the former head of StatsCan, was in fact resigned from Mr. Harper's government—an outstanding public servant. He and Frances Lankin are undertaking very, very important work to talk about the transformation, moving forward.

Again, Mr. Speaker, a balanced budget—one that finds restraint, one that finds savings, one that anticipates an appropriate reduction in the deficit leading up to a balance in 2017-18, but that still places an emphasis on these three priority areas.

This is an important piece of legislation. I'm not standing here today expecting that the opposition are not going to raise concerns—perhaps, in some cases, want to speak against parts of it—that they're not wanting to go to committee and debate and discuss, perhaps even propose amendments. But that is not what has been happening in this Legislature. I think it's very important that people realize that part of the responsibility of government is to bring forward a budgetary plan, to bring forward the supporting bills, and part of the role of the

opposition is to examine and to analyze it to provide criticism, perhaps even provide praise when our two approaches intersect. But instead, what we have seen over the past number of days when it comes to this budget, and the past couple of weeks and months, is bell ringing and an inability for the opposition to engage, to take their role and responsibility to engage.

What has been their excuse for this childish behaviour? It has been because they want a committee to look into the Ornge situation. Mr. Speaker, I've told this story before. We had a visitor to the Legislature whom I met with, someone who was there making a case for their industry. They were here, and they said, "Why all the bells?" I said, "Because they're asking for an Ornge committee." He said, "But there is an Ornge committee; I saw it on the news." I think it is very important that we remind members of the Legislature and those viewers at home that we have a committee of this Legislature, a standing committee of this Legislature, the public accounts committee, which is right now looking into the Ornge situation. They are doing an outstanding job. They have held countless hours of hearings. They have called witnesses forward. They have the powers and responsibilities of any standing committee of this Legislature. At the same time, their work, of course, has been informed by a very thorough report which was done by the Auditor General, who is an officer of this Legislature. We also have a very important piece of legislation, Bill 50, before this Legislature which responds to the Auditor General's report. Again, if the opposition were to allow, instead of this childish bell ringing, this piece of legislation to be brought forward and debated, it would inform the entire Ornge debate.

So, Mr. Speaker, I stand here today in support of Bill 55, and I call on the opposition to take their responsibility seriously, to realize the fact—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I thank the House leader.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It's 6 o'clock. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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No. 55

N° 55

ISSN 1180-2987

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 40th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**



**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 17 May 2012

Jeudi 17 mai 2012

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 17 May 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 17 mai 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONG ACTION FOR ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR UNE ACTION ÉNERGIQUE POUR L'ONTARIO (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 16, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / *Projet de loi 55, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mrs. Jane McKenna: It's my pleasure to rise in the House today and lend my voice to the ongoing debate on Bill 55. This bill addresses the technical measures that are being put forward by the government to enact the 2012 budget. Consistent with the marketing around that document, this is titled the Strong Action for Ontario Act, but of course Bill 55 shares more than a branding flavour with the budget. It also shares the same weakness of the budget. The words are supposed to be simple and reassuring, but once you get into the nuts and bolts of the thing, it's another story entirely.

We can look to financial experts for clues as to the strengths of the budget, a budget that increased taxes and spending in the face of a \$16-billion deficit. Once this government's budget motion passed, it didn't take long for the verdict to come in. Inside of two days, we got word from the credit rating agency Standard and Poor's that our outlook had been downgraded from stable to negative. Another day, another bit of bad financial news. This time it was credit agency Moody's, which one-upped S&P and actually downgraded the province's credit rating. Moody's pointed to the province's obese debt and leisurely path to fiscal balance as the key reason for the move.

The Liberal government is happy to write off these kinds of events when it serves its interests: "If the ratings agencies make a sour face when they look at our books, well, sticks and stones and all that. Who cares what the

credit rating agency has to say? It's basically just a horoscope for the Bay Street set." If it's good news from the credit rating agencies, well, then, slap a gold star on the report card and get it to the fridge so the Premier can stick it up. That kind of on-again, off-again regard for the value of financial analysis might work as a conversational device here in the House or as a tool to shrug off a scrum out in the hallway but, ultimately, these verdicts carry more weight than the government likes to let on.

It's true that these moves don't mean that the province is doomed—there was always time for sense to prevail—but what it does mean, almost certainly, is that we're getting a warning sign. This is the canary in the coal mine that the government can't bring itself to shut down. These ratings will almost certainly mean that if we don't sort out the province's books, the way we borrow money—whether we can, how much it will cost us when we do—will be impacted at some point in the future. This is bound to drive up borrowing costs and bleed scarce tax dollars from essential programs.

But this government continues to act as it did in the fall, when the Auditor General took us inside the Liberal hot dog factory and shone a flashlight inside the machines. The state of denial wafting across from the other side of the House is thick, Speaker. This government is still spending money it doesn't have: spending \$1.8 million an hour more than it takes in; still making big promises with plenty of loopholes and fine print; still rolling out the marketing material to make it all seem like mother's milk. Instead of doing some soul-searching when analysis issued these warnings, the government goes merrily along with its head in the clouds.

My only explanation is that they're mistaking all those red flags for Liberal fan boys. Those of us on this side of the House and many of those outside of the Legislature recognize the warning signs for what they are. Again, this goes back to what my party, the official opposition, has been saying about this government for quite some time. It's cold comfort to be right on this count.

It doesn't bode well for the province that the party opposite continues to stubbornly dismiss this criticism. Again, this is a government that is unwilling to live within its means and that has no real plan to create jobs, other than rubbing that lucky rabbit's foot; I'm sure it has a bald patch by now. They'll tell you that this budget speaks to this and speaks to that, and that is certainly true. There is a lot of talk, a lot of wordplay and a lot of hot air.

This budget was put together in a vacuum in the dark by people who selectively teleconferenced rather than

holding pre-budget hearings. So instead of getting a sense of what Ontarians really want, about where the needs actually are and without tapping into the experts of the private sector, this government has stayed in its bubble. Ontarians understand that we need to tighten our belts. They know about how being in debt up to your eyeballs can cramp your lifestyle. They get it.

Ontario's business gets it. They know that capital is mobile and that investors can go where they feel they stand the greatest odds of being successful, just like skilled trades workers can, just like new Canadians can. Why would someone voluntarily go where their taxes are high, the debt and the structural deficit are being maintained as respectfully as an historic site, where hydro rates are crushing and where red tape chokes out new growth? It's an open question.

I held a prosperity round table in Burlington in the week before the budget vote, a business community brainstorming session that stimulated a lot of discussion. The member from Thornhill joined us for that afternoon, and I'm sure he can attest to the events of the day. We heard from small start-ups, established landmark businesses, highly specialized organizations and ones that were amazingly diverse. We heard from passionate professionals working in the health care, education and financial sectors, real estate, construction, skilled trades, the service industry, waste management and much more. We had a great exchange of ideas. We heard a lot of determination to turn things around.

But we also heard a number of concerns about the budget and the path this government is on. There are no performance measures in this government, and there's so much waste and duplication. There are far too many agencies, boards and commissions. The government is constantly getting in the way. It does nothing to help small businesses do more.

"We have so much red tape to go through, as a small business of 120 employees, that we need to staff two more to make sure we're compliant with all the regulations at every level of government," said one small business owner.

"Health care is fragmented, and patients are treated far more poorly than they were in the past. Hospital administrators are not doctors. Ask the doctors how to improve health care," said a doctor.

"Renewable energy is a great thing. We all believe in it. But you have to ask yourself, 'At what cost?' With those rates, I can't hire and I can't invest back into my own business," said another business owner.

People see being pro-business as a bad thing. But businesses create jobs and businesses benefit everyone, not just the CEO or the owner who gets paid to take the risk. Businesses are organic creatures that employ people.

There's no vision in the Liberal budget, and there's no structural change, which is really what is needed. How are we going to make Ontario great again when the current government has no plan and no vision? On that, Speaker, I am going to take this moment to adjourn this debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Burlington has moved adjournment of the debate. Agreed? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 0910 to 0940.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mrs. McKenna has moved adjournment of the debate.

All in favour, please rise and remain standing.

All those opposed, please stand and remain standing.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 14; the nays are 29.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion lost. The member for Burlington, you have the floor.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Mr. Speaker, it would be reckless and irresponsible not to call for a select committee. That's why I did continue to ask for adjournment of the debate, because Ornge continues to get worse.

Once again, there is always time for sense to prevail. Despite the warning signs, despite the government's failure to rein in spending, failure to root out inefficiencies and waste, failure to create jobs or inspire the confidence of the credit rating agencies, Ontario can still have a bright future, but getting there is going to demand more than the same old, same old response. Courage asks us to step out of our comfort zone. Honesty is also helpful. Reduced spending increases are obviously not the same as reducing spending. The budget makes a big show of a belt-tightening budget, but it's very much in the same vein as previous budgets, which are part of the reason why this government has managed to double the provincial debt from where it was in 2003 until now.

With new ideas and the commitment to make them work, Ontario can return to its place of pride as an economic powerhouse, but in order to be able to do that, Speaker, first we need to get the fundamentals right.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I listened intently to the bell ringing in that whole debate, and I thought it was a rather interesting tone to the whole sound. I'm getting kind of used to them, if you know what I mean.

Anyway, in regard to the budget bill, everybody understands that in the last election the three parties had the same goal, and that was that we need to be able to manage our expenditures and get back to balance by 2017-18. Clearly, Andrea Horwath and our party were very clear on that, and we believe that is a goal that must be maintained.

However, the approach that this government has taken toward this budget is a bit, how would you say, harsh. It is an austerity-type budget that probably does more to cool down the economy than it does to warm it up. I just say to myself that there are different ways of being able to achieve that balance. It would seem to me that the government would be well advised to try to find ways to

do a number of things. One, we need to manage our expenditures; there's no question about that. With any government, any private budget, any business budget, you always have to look at the bottom line and ask, "Am I spending wisely?" I think it is incumbent upon government to be able to do that.

But on the other side, we need to look at how we can grow revenue. You grow revenue not necessarily by just building casinos, as has been the penchant of this government, but by taking a look at different initiatives that are able to stimulate growth in your economy so that, in fact, you have more revenue coming in, which assists you in getting the revenue to be able to pay for the things that need to be done.

But remember why we're here. We're in a deficit situation because governments have decided to go down the road of corporate and personal tax cuts that have taken the revenue away from the province and its ability to pay for the services that we have. I believe it's a part of a master stroke on the part of the right wing to underfund our public services to create the crisis that allows them to privatize. I'm just surprised that the government is falling into that trap as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I was delighted that despite the very challenging economic circumstances facing the province of Ontario—and I know time is limited for each speaker, and the speaker was not able to make reference to this—the government of Ontario is funding the project, which is the Joseph Brant hospital project in Burlington, Ontario, and also a renovation and expansion project at Cambridge.

Now, I have heard from the opposition from time to time—I know there's another project in Simcoe North as well. What's interesting about all three of those ridings—because I have read someone from the Conservative caucus say somewhere that while in the Conservative ridings they're not proceeding with projects, in government-held ridings they are. I can't remember—maybe the members from Burlington and Cambridge can tell me. My memory does not go back to the last time we elected a Liberal in either one of those ridings. It's been a long, long time before we have done that. We simply looked at the need for those particular projects, and the one in Simcoe North as well. Mr. Dunlop, I know, is very delighted to see that expenditure of somewhere well over \$400 million. This is very important, that we continue with those projects.

What happens is, I keep hearing from the opposite side that somehow we should be cutting more. But then, when we do not proceed with a specific project in the time frame we had hoped to do so, we're accused of being partisan or of not operating our government appropriately. I think we're trying to establish that balance that is important. I am disappointed, and I think if she had more time she would have mentioned that balance.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rob Leone: I'm pleased to stand in support of our PC caucus member from Burlington. Certainly, I will

address the fact that the ridings of Cambridge and Burlington have been long-time PC ridings, and they will remain long-time PC ridings on account of good representation.

See, the problem is this: Since the budget was tabled at the end of March, the size of our provincial debt has increased by \$2 billion—\$2 billion. So, yes, we have a need in this province to set some priorities and we need to be able to fund those priorities based on need. They don't get that on that side. They like to make these decisions on politics; they like to make these decisions on the fact that they might gain or save some Liberal seats. That's how they make decisions on that side of the House.

We believe that we need to make sure the fundamentals are in place to have those priorities based on need met. Growing the size of our debt by \$2 billion in two months is no recipe for us to have the kind of fiscal situation that allows us to invest in the priorities that we desire. And we don't agree with the NDP. We don't think that we have a revenue problem in the province of Ontario; we have a spending problem in the province of Ontario. Spending has increased by \$20 billion since 2008—\$20 billion. This was supposed to be one-time stimulus spending, that has continued year after year. Even in this year's budget, the austerity budget, we see the government's spending going up by 2.5%. This is supposed to be an austerity budget. Where is the austerity? Debts are going up. Deficits aren't going down. That's the record of the Liberal government. Their priorities are out of whack. We stand by our priorities and we're able to fund those.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a pleasure to be able to address this matter this morning. My colleague from the good area of Timmins spoke about the fundamental problem with this government, which has been its ongoing addiction to tax cuts, both at the corporate level and looking at the personal level.

Speaker, you cannot run a government by constantly cutting your revenue. If in fact this Reagan approach to economics was successful, we would have seen increased employment in Canada, in Ontario, and increased business investment. But the reality is, when you look at the last decade, when you look at each tax cut, it has been accompanied by a reduction in investment in Ontario by business. The tax cuts have made sure that corporations are tax rich, but they've undermined the investments we need in health, education and infrastructure.

0950

I also want to note, Speaker, that this government is proceeding, even though it is facing problems with its credit rating, with investments in nuclear power that are going to undermine the credit rating of this province.

In April, Ontario Power Generation was given a rating of A-1 by Standard and Poor's. What's most interesting is that if the province of Ontario was not there to guarantee the operations of OPG, its rating would have been BBB, the same rating as Ireland, Italy and Spain. They

listed, in their reasons for giving them a low credit rating, the risk of nuclear technology. This government says that it's disciplined fiscally, but in fact it is not.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Response from the member from Burlington.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Thank you so much, Speaker, and thank you so much for everybody's input as well.

I'd like to say that, sitting here, it is shocking to me the situation that we are in. If we just do the math, and we do \$1.8 million more an hour than we take in, and we take the \$500 million, let's say, that we get from the 23,000 people who make over \$500,000 a year, which we won't, but let's say we do, that money was spent within 10 days. People don't seem to realize the Band-Aid effects that we do, where that has gotten us and where that is going to go.

The other sad thing is, I had a round table in Burlington, like I had said, and I had all kinds of very diverse people there—big companies, small companies, doctors, nurses—and the number one thing was, when they sat there, they said, "Do you know, Jane, what people don't seem to realize is, you might only think it's 23,000 people who are affected, but we are the engine, we are the entrepreneurs who continue to keep Ontario where it is and where it needs to go. The sad thing is, what you don't understand is, capital is mobile, and we will not invest in high debt, high taxes and high energy; we don't have to. So, my business, although I employ 100 people, the other fellow who employs 200 people, they don't have to stay in Burlington. Why would they?" So we are slowly, absolutely killing all of the things we need to be the best place that we can possibly live.

So, what part of it are we not understanding? When I sit here on the other side as the opposition, it is immoral, reckless and irresponsible to leave this for our children, our grandchildren, to be in the situation that we are in. You've taken a loan at our taxpayers' expense and put us in a position that no one deserves to be in, and to patronize us any more for what has continued to go on with a budget that says nothing is appalling to me.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to join the debate today, as always. It's an honour, of course, to stand in the House.

I've got a couple of things to talk about. I've got my riding to talk about, the challenges of the area that I represent, Essex—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I've just been advised by the table that you've already spoken on the budget bill.

Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you, Speaker. I was eager to hear my colleague from Essex speak, because I know he had volumes to say.

I want to follow a couple of themes in this particular debate, and I want to start with the one I just raised in questions and comments to the previous speaker. There has been a move across North America and across Europe

on the part of the right wing to argue that tax cuts are the way to prosperity. If you listen to the Bushes of the world, the Sarkozys and the Dalton McGuintys of the world, and the Harrises before that, there has been this belief that if you cut taxes, and you cut them deep enough and fast enough, it is going to prime the pump of the economy and it's going to put us into prosperity. I just want to say that it has been totally debunked.

When you take a look at what has happened around the world, all it has managed to do is remove the essential funding that's necessary to be able to fund those services that we also need in our public services, such as health care, education, the maintenance of our highways, paying for policing, firefighting and all of those other essential services that we do in the province of Ontario.

I don't argue, for a second, that we should be raising a lot of taxes. That's not what my argument is. My argument is that we build services in this province based on a certain amount of revenue at the time, and the revenue was calculated to be whatever it was on the taxes that were being charged. Along comes the right wing, first guys like Mike Harris, then Brian Mulroney and George Bush, Dalton McGuinty, Monsieur Sarkozy, Mr. Cameron and others, who are all of the same ilk, saying if you cut those taxes that, in fact, what you're going to do is prime the pump. Well, we found that it has done completely the opposite. In fact, what you've done is you've severely underfunded the ability of the government to provide the services that they have.

That is where I think the original intention was in lowering those taxes. The right wing didn't care so much about their friends being able to put more money in their pockets. There's just this ingrained belief that somehow or other government should not be in the business of doing a whole bunch of things that it's doing now. If you underfund the system, you'll throw it into crisis. It's a little bit like what Mr. Snobelen had said at the time that he was the Minister of Education: If you create a crisis, it creates the backdrop to make the changes that we want, ideologically, within the education system.

It's the same when it comes to the cutting of corporate taxes. If you cut corporate taxes and you cut taxes to higher-income Canadians and Ontarians, what you eventually do is underfund the system. When you underfund the system, all that people know is, "I'm waiting longer at the lineup to get services somewhere." Either the police officer takes longer to get to the accident scene, the hospital is not able to see you as quickly as they should, or the services that you need, as far as permits to do whatever, take longer than they should. So you've underfunded the system, created a crisis, and in the end, the public says, "Well, I don't know. Something's not working. You've got to fix it."

Then along comes another right-wing government that says, "Okay. The way to fix that now is through austerity." So now we've got the McGuinty government, like the Sarkozy government, like the George Bush government, like the Brian Mulroney and like the Mr. Harper governments, all the same, saying, "Austerity is the only way to be able to deal with this."

Well, you're seeing in Europe that there's a backlash to that whole ideology. You saw the results of the election in France where a socialist president was elected on the basis that there is a different way to deal with deficits. You don't have to strictly do austerity. You have to have a balanced approach that, yes, government has to manage its expenses and that we need to make sure we're frugal in how we spend the dollars of the taxpayer, but there are other things that we also need to do, as a way of being able to find balance within our budgets.

I would argue that the government is not as aggressive as they need to be on the other things. I support the government, in the sense of trying to ensure that we are smart about how we spend public dollars and how we administer our public services, but I just want to say upfront, we're not all that bad as it is. If you take a look at how we deliver services in this province, we do it pretty efficiently. If you look at the cost of health care per capita in Ontario, as compared to the United States, we do it far more efficiently than they do in the United States. I would say the same goes for a whole bunch of other services that we provide.

Why not look at the other side of the equation? Why not look at the revenue side? So, for example, Andrea Horwath and the New Democrats in the last round of negotiations around the budget motion said that in order to support the budget motion—not necessarily the budget, but the budget motion—that we wanted the government to move on a surtax of two points for income earners over \$500,000. We said that that's ultimately reasonable because it says two things: one, that we're able to demonstrate that it's not just the people at the bottom that are having to bear the weight of trying to balance the budget—those people whose jobs are going to be cut and those people who are not going to get the services they need etc.—but that there's a sharing of the pain. Those people that are doing well in our economy, who can afford to pay, pay a little bit more. That has gotten us about another \$500 million that allows us, then, to ensure that we can, maybe, not close some of those services in health care systems across this province. It allows us, maybe, not to lay off as many teachers; allows us, maybe, not to reduce services when it comes to policing or fire or whatever other public services we offer. It's not enough to balance the whole budget, but it is part of the answer.

The other part of it, I believe—and this is where the government is missing the boat—is in being able to prime the economy in a way that you're able to create stimulus in the private sector. I'm not arguing just building capital infrastructure programs, because of course that's important, but also looking at how government can be of assistance to the private sector to be able to create more economic opportunity within Ontario.

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For example, one of the things that a lot of people in all of our ridings tell us is that if you're a small entrepreneur and you're trying to start up a business, it's hard to get capitalized. Trying to borrow money from the banks is very difficult to do, because they want to ensure that

they have as much security as they can to minimize the risk, and the entrepreneur who is trying to start up the business opportunity, he or she may have a great idea but has a real problem trying to capitalize the enterprise.

Now, I'm not saying that government should just give grants out to businesses; I wouldn't argue that for a second. But I think what government can do is create programs that assist the private sector in being able to do some of the things they've got to do. For example, you could backstop loans. The northern heritage fund at one time—no longer—used to backstop loans to the private sector in a much more important way than it does now. It allowed a lot of entrepreneurs across northern Ontario to start businesses that are still in existence today, and they were able to secure those loans so they could create wealth, create jobs in our communities, and those tax dollars, by way of those economic activities, came back to the general revenue of Ontario.

In some cases, some of those businesses failed, but at least the money that was spent in the economy in order to start up that new business enterprise was goods being purchased within the communities, and some jobs created over a period of time. So the loss wasn't as much as you would think.

I think that's one thing you can do. You can have a way of being able to backstop loans so that the entrepreneur has to come up with their money, has to borrow money, but the government could be playing a much more important role when it comes to helping backstop those loans.

The other thing you can do is what we've been suggesting to the government and that we somewhat negotiated inside the agreement on the budget motion, and that is to give tax credits to enterprises that create jobs and do investment in the province of Ontario. Why should you give anybody a tax cut in a corporation or a business if they're not going to give you some return on that money that you're giving them towards creating jobs and wealth in Ontario? As social Democrats, as New Democrats in Ontario, Andrea Horwath is saying, "Only reward the job creators. Don't give the money to the ones that are going to take the profits to the Cayman Islands, but give the money to those people who say, 'You know what? I'm prepared to invest in Ontario. I want to retool my factory. I want to do R&D work on something that's going to create wealth in Ontario. I want to create jobs.'" You say to those people, "We'll give you a refundable tax credit for part of that investment as an incentive for you to invest in the province of Ontario."

Doing those kinds of things doesn't cost Ontario a lot of money, but what it does do is create a whole lot of stimulus within your economy on the private sector side, where business says, "You know what? Ontario is an interesting place to do business. Maybe I'll invest there."

We can look at our friends in Quebec who have looked at how you do development in the Far North. They have come to terms with First Nations when it comes to how you're able to do development in the Far North in a way that respects First Nations and the cultural

interests that they have in their land and at the same time give them an opportunity to get some economic return on what is happening on their own traditional lands.

I was talking to a mining company last week that says that the difference between doing business in Ontario and doing business in Quebec is night and day; it's easier in Quebec because the province of Quebec understands that creating economic wealth and doing that in conjunction with First Nations is good for First Nations and good for Quebec.

If we were doing those kinds of things here in Ontario, I would argue we'd be able to build the wealth that allows us to close the gap by 2017-18, to be able to balance the budget, something that's important to do, but looks at a balanced approach and doing something that makes far more sense than what this government is doing now.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mario Sergio: I enjoyed the comments by the member for Timmins-James Bay. He's a long-standing member of the House, and I know he cares a lot about his community and the people, especially up in the north area where he comes from.

I have to say that this, if I'm correct, is the ninth budget that this government has brought forward since we have taken power. We have gone through some wonderful economic times, some not-so-good times and some terrible times. But I have to say that since we came to power, we did deliver the goods during the good times, and we are trying to do our very best during very serious economic times.

At this particular time, even when the Drummond report was telling us to do certain things that would have slowed down the assistance that we are providing in health care and in education and in creating jobs or providing more affordable housing, we said, "No, there are certain things that we are committed to and we'll go along and we'll do those, especially in health care and education."

We have seen the direction of the government in this existing budget here. I think we should move it forward, Speaker. I think we should have the opportunity to do the things that we want to do because we mean well for the people of Ontario, especially in health care and education.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rob Leone: I'm glad I have another opportunity to address this budget debate. I want to thank the member for Timmins-James Bay for his enlightened comments on the budget. I think that he raises a number of points, some of which, of course, we agree with; others, of course, we don't. That's just part of the way things work in this place. At least we can say of the NDP that they stand on principles, and we stand on principles. I'm not sure those folks across the aisle quite do the same thing. I'm not really sure what principles they stand on.

I have to say as well that the Minister of the Environment, the member for St. Catharines, pointed out in his

comments during the member from Burlington's turn—he targeted myself, he targeted the member for Burlington in terms of our hospital infrastructure projects. But let me turn the tables on them. How many jobs were lost in the member for St. Catharines' riding? How much money was spent to save the seat for the member for Mississauga South, on the gas plant? How much was saved or spent on the fact that the Oakville gas plant was turned on?

These folks aren't even agreeing with the decisions they make on these plants. The Liberal cabinet decided to go to the gas plant in Mississauga. The member for Mississauga South was reported as saying that that was just a foolish idea. In fact, I don't know if I can use the word "dumb" in this place, but that's what he was quoted in the paper as saying.

They're spending money each and every day trying to save or gain Liberal seats, and we have this \$15-billion deficit—this monstrosity of a deficit—more than three times the size of the deficit in all the other provinces combined. That's what we see. If they think that is principle that they're standing by, I don't know.

I'm standing by what we say here: Rein in government spending, get this deficit under control.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always a privilege and a pleasure to be in this House when the member from Timmins-James Bay talks about the experiences that he has had and the ideas and the views that he carries with the vast years of experience that he has had in this House.

One issue he touched on was actually the funding formula, as far as some of the services that are available here in the province. The concern is where this government is going with privatization. We've seen where privatization has led us with the Conservative government in the past years. It's something that you should learn from, not to go down that road, because you're really going to be taking away the essential services that we need in many of our communities.

Underfunding, in a lot of what is in this budget, is going to affect the MNR, is going to affect the Ministry of the Environment. These are essential ministries that need the funding in order to get those projects and the good ideas that are going forward. We've identified many, many, many good projects that would address a lot of our concerns in these industries, especially in the MNR and the MOE. But these projects that have been studied and analyzed are sitting on shelves. And why are they sitting—sitting on shelves?

Laughter.

Mr. Michael Mantha: That was close. I'll blame that on my French.

Why they are sitting on shelves is because we don't have the capacity to implement a lot of those policies. They're great ideas. Our biologists are no longer with the MNR. Our game wardens are struggling in order to make their job a successful one in order for them to be happy with their own conscience as far as doing their jobs.

So I'm really happy when I hear that the government is going to really consider the propositions that we've made in order to bring tax credits to employers that create jobs—but do it. Don't just say it; do it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I enjoyed the comments from the member from Timmins—James Bay and the previous speaker. The NDP has been accused in the past of sitting on the fence. That's the first time I've heard it put that way.

I really want to thank the member from Timmins—James Bay. I think he brings forward some sincere opinions, some sincere ideas, as to how he would change the budget bill. I think that was really the way that the NDP approached this: They looked to the Liberal government and they said, "Put forward a budget, and we'll take a look at it." Contrast that with the approach that was taken on the other side of the floor, where the Conservative Party decided that no matter what was put forward, they were opposing the bill, and their members were instructed to oppose the bill.

The member from Cambridge talks about projects as if somebody else is building these projects. The hospital fairy builds the hospitals in the province of Ontario. The fact is, that money comes from the taxpayers of Ontario. The fact is, it comes from the budget, and you either support the budget and the projects contained within, or you don't. If you don't support the budget, then be straight with the people in your own constituency. Go back to your riding and tell people you don't support the building of the hospital. But have the courage to do that. Have the courage to do that. Go back and face the people in your riding and tell people, "I didn't support the hospital. I don't think we should be spending on the hospital, because I've got these great ideas and I'd bring in a different budget some other way, and somebody else will build your hospital."

You've got to take responsibility. You can't suck and blow on this. People aren't going to build the hospital for you. It has to be the people in your riding who pay for the hospital. Be honest with those people and tell them the truth. It's that simple. Own up to them. You were instructed by your leader to vote against your own hospital, and you know it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Timmins—James Bay, two minutes to reply.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I think it's rather unfortunate when we start imputing motives to members in the House. I think we're all honourable members. We may see things differently, but at the end of the day people do things for the reasons they do them.

I just want to go back to what I was trying to say in the debate and that is, there are really two points that I was trying to make. All of us agree that we need to balance the budget by 2017-18. New Democrats and Andrea Horwath have been clear on that. It was in our platform. That's where we want to go.

Where we take difference from the government is, their approach only looks at one particular side of the

equation. Should there be an eye towards managing public services in a more efficient way? Absolutely. I think you need to be careful in how you do that; you don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. But certainly we can take a look at ways of saving money and how we deliver our services. That doesn't necessarily mean to say we have to lay off a bunch of people.

On the other hand, we need to look at what we do on the revenue side, and there's not just directly increasing taxation as the only means to raise revenues. We did the 2% for those people over \$500,000. I think that was vastly reasonable. It was popular; it was supported by almost 80% of the population, and I believe that's why the government adopted that NDP idea, put forward by Andrea Horwath.

The other one is, we need to look at how we can stimulate the private sector, and you do that by creating the incentives that are necessary for them to be able to invest in Ontario, but you only do that for those who are prepared to create jobs and make that actual investment. So you can do the investment tax credit that we proposed to the government that says those who create jobs and do actual investments can get some of that money back by way of an investment tax credit.

You can also look at backstopping loans, because capitalization is the biggest problem that business is having, contrary to what a lot of people would believe. Trying to get money from the banks is very difficult, or raising it on the stock market. So if the government is able to do backstopping of loans, I think it goes a long way to assisting the private sector and stimulating growth in the economy.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Steve Clark: I know that she's not yet in the chamber, but she soon will be. I would like to welcome Denise Wood, the executive director of the Alzheimer Society of Leeds—Grenville, who's here for their lobby day. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I've got a couple of introductions. Carolyn Cybulski, executive director; Susan McLean, volunteer and former caregiver of the Alzheimer Society of Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma District; and Lorraine LeBlanc and Sharon Barthel from the Alzheimer Society of Sudbury-Manitoulin are going to be joining us today.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I'd like to welcome Elizabeth McLellan, who's interning in our office for the summer, to the Legislature today.

Mr. Bill Walker: I would like to welcome Deborah Barker and Pauline Diemert, visitors from the Alzheimer society, to Queen's Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I, as well, would like to welcome representatives from the Alzheimer Society of Toronto: Marija Padjen, a constituent, and Cathy Barrick. Welcome.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: I have two groups to introduce today. I'd like to welcome page Dia's parents, who are here to join us today. We have Dalia, her mom; Jayanta, her dad; and Rupayan, her brother, who are joining us today. Welcome.

Secondly, I'd like to welcome the members of the Alzheimer society: David Harvey, Paul Hargreaves and Naguib Gouda. I'd also like to remind all the members to please come and attend the reception today at noon in room 230. Thank you very much.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Please join me in welcoming my oldest and most loyal friend, Kevin Harley, from Barrie, here today to the chamber.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have some guests in the west gallery: Mr. Dan Munro, from National Helicopters Inc.; Mr. Michael Skrobica, from the Air Transport Association of Canada; Bob Mackie, from Thunder Airlines; and Frank Behrendt, from SkyCare. Welcome to Queen's Park

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm delighted to welcome people from the Alzheimer Society of Ontario. David Harvey is here, and Bob Renaud from Windsor and Elco Drost from Niagara Falls, amongst a number of others who have been introduced. Thank you.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Mr. Speaker, it's my distinct pleasure to welcome four visitors to the members' gallery this morning. First, I welcome two women from the Alzheimer society, who are here taking part in awareness day activities at Queen's Park: Sharon Osvald, a caregiver from Brighton and volunteer with the organization; and Laura Hare, the executive director of the Alzheimer society chapter covering Hastings, Brighton and Quinte West. Your knowledge and insight into this disease is appreciated, and I thank you for travelling to visit Queen's Park today.

Secondly, I welcome two very bright students from St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School in Brampton. They have become YouTube superstars in their quest to restore choice to high school cafeterias. Mr. Brian Baah and Samuel Battista, welcome to Queen's Park.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ça me fait extrêmement plaisir de présenter une de mes bonnes amies, M^{me} Lorraine LeBlanc, qui est également la directrice générale de la Société Alzheimer de Sudbury, as well as one of her volunteers, Mrs. Sharon Barthel, who came today for Alzheimer Society day at Queen's Park.

M. Shafiq Qadri: Je veux accueillir un ami et un collègue. Speaker, I take this opportunity to welcome a friend and colleague, the honourable Naguib Gouda, who is formerly of that noble institution, the Ontario Medical Association, and now part of the Alzheimer Society of Toronto. I recognize him, as he was one of my mentors during the master's certificate in leadership at the Schulich School of Business.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I'd like to welcome here today one of my constituents, Michael Skrobica, who is vice-president of the Air Transport Association of Canada. He is here with three of his colleagues from the Air Transport Association of Canada. Welcome, Michael.

Mr. Kim Craiton: I'm really pleased to introduce some special ladies from my riding of Niagara Falls. They're here with the Alzheimer association of Ontario; they're with the Niagara chapter. Across from me are Teena Kindt and Elco Drost. Welcome.

Mr. Frank Klees: I'd like to extend a warm welcome to Loren Freid, the executive director of the Alzheimer Society of York Region.

Mrs. Teresa Piruzza: I'd like to welcome some people from Windsor as well. It's Sally Bennett, who's the CEO of the Alzheimer Society of Windsor and Essex county and is of course here for the focus today, and another introduction of Bob Renaud, who's involved both in Windsor and provincially with the Alzheimer society. Welcome, and I look forward to meeting with you later.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Not that anyone would want to steal the Speaker's thunder, but in the Speaker's gallery today, we have, from the great riding of Brant, Vic Prendergast, the incoming president of the Alzheimer Society of Ontario. Joining Vic, we have Gale Carey, the CEO of the Alzheimer Society of Ontario. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm working on it.

WEARING OF BRACELETS AND PINS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Agriculture on a point of order.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I believe we have unanimous consent that all members be permitted to wear bracelets in recognition of International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have had a request for unanimous consent to wear the bracelet, and I believe there's a pin that's attached to it so we can wear the pin and the bracelet. Do we agree? Agreed.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Acting Premier. It has now been literally months since this Legislature expressed its will to have a select committee of the Legislature to look into the Ornge scandal. The government has refused to accommodate that. Then the public accounts committee passed a motion asking for an expanded mandate to better do its work to get to the bottom of this scandal. The government continues to ignore that request.

Yesterday, we had evidence of why the Standing Committee on Public Accounts needs that expanded mandate. We heard once again that a senior person in the Ministry of Health was told in July 2008 of ongoings at Ornge that should have been of serious concern to the minister of the day. Now we don't even have time to call that witness.

I want to know from the government: Will they, today—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Mr. Frank Klees:—agree to the expanded mandate of that committee so that we can get on with doing our work?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. John Milloy: I think all members of this Legislature should recognize the good work that is being done by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. Based on the testimony or the hearings that were heard yesterday, I'm pleased to report that the public accounts committee has sat for 29 hours. They've heard from 33 witnesses. The meeting of that committee is governed by a motion that was passed unanimously in this House. The committee will continue to meet. They have plans to hear from other witnesses.

I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that the member used to stand up and say that there's not enough time to hear from witnesses. Do you know what? The committee, finally, as it has the right to do, has changed and will in fact be devoting more hours to those witnesses. As well as the work that's being done by public accounts, it's based on a very comprehensive report done by the AG. We have the OPP looking into it—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. John Milloy:—and we have a piece of legislation in front of this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before we move to the supplementary, I want to remind all members to try to stay within the time allotment for answering and questioning, please. When I say "thank you," that's the end of your wrap-up.

Supplementary.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, could it be possible that the government is refusing to agree to the additional sittings because it doesn't want to have insiders exposed for their contradictory statements, overt lies to the committee about their lobbying efforts of the government, as we heard yesterday? Is that the reason that the government is blocking the work that the public accounts committee wants to make?

I want to hear from the House leader why possibly he would not be willing to give us the mandate that the committee has requested. What are you hiding?

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Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if I'm the only one here who finds it ironic that the honourable member whose party has been blocking legislation, has been tying up committees and is in fact blocking Bill 50, a piece of legislation which will enact the recommenda-

tions that we heard from the Auditor General—that he has the gall to stand here today and somehow criticize us as blocking a committee. The fact of the matter is—as I said, 29 hours and 33 witnesses.

If the honourable member wants to hold hearings on the floor of the House, then let's talk again about Kelly Mitchell. Let's talk and this document that I referenced last week on how to lobby the Progressive Conservative Party, which Mr. Mitchell was paid \$7,000 for writing. Let's talk about the section, "step 1—Make Peace with Frank Klees."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I know you're saying thank you. I will be happy in the supplementary to quote—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: First, I want to thank the House leader for pointing out that the only member that Ornge was intending to make peace with was with me, because I was getting under their skin for exposing their scandal. That's what that was about.

The fact of the matter is that this House leader continues to block our intention to get to the bottom of how the Premier, how the Minister of Finance, how the Minister of Health was lobbied and told, basically in no—there wasn't even an attempt to hide the fact that they were trying to massage the Ornge deal past the Minister of Health. That's what was testified to yesterday.

I'm going to give the House leader one more chance. Will the House leader, in front of everyone who is watching him, agree to stand up and say that the public accounts committee will be given all the time that it needs to get to the root of the problem of this Ornge—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, if the member insists upon having hearings here on the floor of the House, let me continue to quote from this document about how to lobby the PC Party. This is my favourite, Mr. Speaker; they will enjoy this:

"It will be important to tell the Ornge story—from beginning to present—during any meeting narrative—and to show how Ornge's business model and practices are entirely aligned with the Conservative platform..."

Kelly Mitchell, a prominent Conservative lobbyist, someone who raised tens of thousands of dollars for that party, was paid \$7,000 to write that. There are questions about Kelly Mitchell and his relationship with Lynne Golding, with Guy Giorno, with a whole cast of Conservative—

Interjections.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Nobody's buying that, John.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That'll do.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And the member will withdraw.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'll withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You may finish.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, 29 hours, 33 witnesses, and the committee will continue to meet. I think it's fascinating the information that has come forward about individuals like Kelly Mitchell and other prominent Conservatives and what they were doing with Ornge.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, if there's anyone who's hiding anything, I don't think you would look at this side of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Health. For months now, Ontarians have watched as the Minister of Health, through her inaction and an absence of leadership, undermines the integrity of the province's air ambulance system. The Minister of Health has continually denied responsibility for the corruption and has refused to be held accountable for the serious risks to patient safety. The minister has done a severe disservice to the people of this province with their failed leadership and refusal to put the safety of patients above her own political ambitions.

Yesterday, the public accounts committee heard yet even more damning testimony from former Ornge executives. Yet again, we learned that several highly connected Liberal insiders lobbied the government on behalf of Ornge.

So I ask the minister, when will she come clean and admit to this House that Don Guy and Alfred Apps played significant roles in facilitating the corruption that occurred—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, I think all of us recognize the good work—certainly on this side of the House—that's being done by the public accounts committee. I think we should let that committee do its work.

But if the honourable members across the way insist upon engaging in some sort of kangaroo court here on the floor of the House with these drive-by smears, let me raise some other issues, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to know more about how it came to pass that Ornge established a satellite operation at the Oshawa Municipal Airport. Here's what we know from the committee: Last week, a former Ornge executive said that he opposed the move and that it was a very poor choice, for a host of the reasons. We also know, however, that the member for Whitby—Oshawa not only lobbied to get a base at the airport in her riding, but she posed for a very snazzy photo which appeared in a local publication.

So again, if they want to hold hearings on the floor of the House, perhaps they could stand and answer some of those questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Again to the minister: The minister must be embarrassed by that pathetic response. Surely the people of Ontario deserve better.

It is no longer fair to say "corruption" at Ornge. The corruption and ineptitude is now very much entrenched in the Liberal Party and this Liberal government. Liberal Party president Alf Apps and the Premier's former chief of staff and current campaign director, Don Guy, lobbied numerous government ministries and political staff to prevent accountability and mask serious legal and safety issues at Ornge.

Speaker, when will the minister apologize to the people of Ontario for her party and government's role in the biggest corruption scandal ever to hit Ontario?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Before I turn to the minister, I will offer a caution. The member is getting desperately close to being unparliamentary. I caution him—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. I don't need your coaching either. Order, please. This is serious stuff that I need to deal with, and I need to hear clearly.

I'm offering a caution. The member is desperately close to using unparliamentary language to the place. I caution him.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, members of this Legislature know the strong action that was taken by the Minister of Health. We now have a new board at Ornge. We have a new CEO at Ornge. She called in the forensic auditors, and unfortunately, due to information that was uncovered, she had to call in the OPP, which is undertaking an investigation. The Auditor General has looked into the Ornge situation. We have hearings before the public accounts committee and we have a very important piece of legislation in front of this Legislature. The answer I want to know is why a piece of legislation that is based upon the Auditor General's findings is being held up by the actions of the members opposite.

If they want to continue with the drive-by smears and throw partisan barbs, tell us about Rick Potter and Guy Giorno and Lynne Golding and Kelly Mitchell, and the list goes on—some of the most prominent Conservatives in the province of Ontario, who are up to their eyeballs in the Ornge fiasco.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Minister, that's simply not good enough. You're a minister of the crown and you failed to act accordingly. Your behaviour on this matter is unbecoming of the office you hold. You and your government owe the people of this province an apology.

Your government has stonewalled every single attempt this Legislature has made to get to the bottom of

this scandal. I've said in the past weeks that this scandal was knocking at the Premier's door. Speaker, I was wrong. This scandal has let itself in, poured itself a drink and taken a seat at the Premier's desk. This isn't an Ornge scandal; this is a Liberal scandal.

I ask the minister: Who in your office and the Premier's office spoke with Alf Apps or Don Guy or the myriad of other Liberal insiders about the schemes to defraud Ontario's taxpayers?

Hon. John Milloy: On this side of the House, we are not going to disrespect the good work of the public accounts committee. The fact of the matter is, they have sat for 29 hours, they have heard from 33 witnesses and they continue to conduct hearings.

The real question is, when the Auditor General came forward with recommendations, those recommendations were put into a piece of legislation, Bill 50. Why does the opposition, through childish games, through bell-ringing—not through debate, but through a childish, juvenile approach—why are they blocking an important piece of legislation, the final piece of the puzzle addressing the problems that have been discovered at Ornge? That is the real question and that is where the opposition has to show some responsibility and allow Bill 50 to proceed.

1050

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre adjoint. Last month, the Premier told this House that he had had one meeting with Dr. Chris Mazza. He even told us the date: October 30, 2005. Testimony introduced yesterday at public accounts completely contradicts that statement.

Does the Acting Premier have anything to say about that?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I had an opportunity to review the testimony yesterday, as well as the Hansard, and I found the two to be entirely consistent. The Premier did indicate in his response in the House that in fact the one meeting that he did reference was the one that he had a clear recollection of, and then he also indicated there may have been other meetings because—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: —literally with thousands of people every month. He was very clear, in my view, about that response.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: An email tabled yesterday at committee said that former Liberal Party president Alfred Apps—I think everybody is familiar with this name by now—referred to a meeting between the Premier and Dr. Mazza that took place on June 19, 2007. I will quote from Mr. Apps: It “went perfectly.”

Is the Acting Premier able to tell us, as we continue to dig into Ornge, how many more of those meetings will we find?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. John Milloy: The Deputy Premier has answered the question about the Premier's meeting. But again, if the members want to hold hearings on the floor of the House, then let's talk about the Oshawa airport and why, when senior Ornge executives were against it, did one of the prominent members of the Conservative Party opposite not only lobby for it, but get her picture taken so that she could go out and support Ornge and now, all of a sudden, seems to be forgetting that incident.

What about Kelly Mitchell and his very, very close ties to the Conservative Party and the fact that he was paid \$7,000 to put together a strategy document—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. John Milloy: —go to Conservatives to talk about how Ornge fit nicely—as I said, to show how Ornge's business model and practices are entirely aligned with the Conservative platform.

Again, if they want to hold hearings on the floor of the House, I think there is a myriad of questions about the ties between the Conservative Party and so many people involved with Ornge.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, Mr. Apps also referred to plans for further meetings with the Premier over dinner, yet another contradiction to the Premier's claim. I think, frankly, that this government has some explaining to do. The Premier said that he met Dr. Mazza once, but evidence keeps emerging that well-connected Liberal insiders arranged more than one meeting.

When is our Premier going to come out of hiding and clear this up?

Hon. John Milloy: The Deputy Premier has responded to the issue of the Premier meeting these individuals, and the Premier himself, on April 25 in this House, spoke to this. He has indicated that he may have attended an event where Dr. Mazza was present, but I think we all recognize that the Premier of this province meets thousands of people at events.

The bigger question is, how do we move forward to improve the governance of Ornge? The Minister of Health has taken some very strong steps but there's one piece of the puzzle missing, and that is incorporating the recommendations of the Auditor General into a piece of legislation, Bill 50.

I ask my friend in the New Democratic Party, will she join with the Liberal government to make sure that we can stop the childish bell-ringing of the official opposition and make sure this very important piece of legislation moves forward? If she really believes in making improvements at Ornge, she would join us in those efforts.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Acting Premier. Yesterday, Mr. Jacob Blum, a former executive at Ornge, provided his diary to the Standing Committee

on Public Accounts. His notes indicated, from December 10, 2007, that Don Guy, the former chief of staff to the Premier and the Liberal campaign director, had meetings with the Ministry of Finance and would set up more meetings with finance and the AG.

As you know, lobbying consists of meeting public officials and arranging meetings with public office holders. Is the Acting Premier ready to say that Mr. Guy did not arrange or attend meetings with public officials or office holders regarding Ornge?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I think we need to correct the record, again, if they want to hold hearings here on the floor of the House. There was a partial diary that came forward from Mr. Jacob Blum. He was there at committee. I think it's important, when he speaks about Jacob Blum, that he should also talk about his sterling Progressive Conservative ties. In fact, members may want to know that Mr. Blum was the PC campaign manager in Toronto Centre. He joins a growing list—from Rick Potter, Guy Giorno, Lynne Golding, Kelly Mitchell—of members of the Progressive Conservative Party with ties to—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Are you calling him a liar?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will come to order—second time.

Carry on.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, Mr. Speaker, I think we should allow the committee to do its work. They have now heard from 33 witnesses, including a number of individuals that he asked about in his question. They've asked for information coming forward. Let's let the committee do its work, but let's look forward to Bill 50.

Again, I ask the New Democratic Party, will you join with the government in trying to defeat this childish bellingering that we hear from the Progressive Conservatives?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, through you again to the Acting Premier: Mr. Blum's diary goes on to say that Don Guy will ensure that Ornge gets a fair hearing and that he was confident that he can manage the outcomes. Is that a service that Mr. Guy regularly performs for this Liberal government? If so, isn't that lobbying?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, again, I don't favour holding hearings in question period through some sort of kangaroo court, but if the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton wants that, then perhaps he can explain to this House why he opposed a motion in front of the committee to ask Mr. Blum, this prominent Conservative, to produce his full diary. Why did he oppose such a motion so that we could have seen all the facts, going forward, about Mr. Blum and his ties to Ornge, as well as, as I say, his ties to the Conservative Party opposite?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Again, Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Acting Premier.

Here's what people really see. Liberal insiders with close connections to the Premier and to the cabinet—including Don Guy, a man who some would say got them their jobs—were paid hundreds of thousands of dollars and claim that they never raised Ornge with the Premier and never arranged any meetings with the government. Evidence submitted yesterday contradicts this claim completely.

Who does the Acting Premier think the people of Ontario will believe? Isn't it clear at this point that we need more time to get to the truth, to find out what really happened with Ornge?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Cambridge, come to order and be in your own seat.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I got a sense you might not have heard me. The member from Cambridge will come to order, and he's not in his own seat.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, again, if the honourable member wants to get to the truth, maybe he should stop defending the Progressive Conservative campaign manager in the riding of Toronto Centre.

The fact of the matter is, he asked what the people of Ontario want. You know what? The people of Ontario want to make sure that we have strengthened oversight of Ornge. I want to congratulate the Minister of Health, who has taken some very, very important steps to change the structure and the governance of Ornge, with one exception; there's one exception left, and that is responding to the Auditor General's report through a very important piece of legislation in this Legislature.

I ask all the opposition parties: Why are they blocking that legislation? Why are they blocking the good work of a highly respected officer of this Legislature, the Auditor General?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Simcoe–Grey has a problem; he sits right beside me. So I would ask him to refrain.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I don't either.

New question.

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PROTECTION OF PRIVACY

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, yesterday I raised a question regarding the protection of the personal and private information of Ontarians now that this information is being stored in the United States. You stated, "We have built ... tough protections into the company's contract. They cannot disclose any information without prior approval from us."

It sounds good, but Minister, were you aware that under the terms of the United States Patriot Act, the United States government has the right to access information on

Canadians if it is stored in the US or accessible electronically? The Patriot Act supersedes any private contracts. Minister, do you still maintain that the personal information of Ontarians is well protected?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I do appreciate the question, and I appreciate the opportunity to respond. We take privacy very, very seriously. I want to be able to say very clearly that the company awarded the contract is contractually obligated to follow Ontario's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act as part of its agreement with us. The company cannot directly or indirectly use, collect or disclose any personal information for any purposes not authorized by our ministry. They must keep these records secure. They must prevent any loss, misuse, unauthorized access, disclosure, alteration and destruction. The fact is, we are very, very clear in terms of those protections, and we have every confidence that the privacy of Ontarians is secure.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question was about United States laws, not the company's. According to your own ministry, 730,000 licences have been processed by Active Outdoors in Tennessee; 730,000 Ontarians have now had their personal information shipped to the United States, and it can be accessed by the US government.

In light of the provisions of the United States' Patriot Act, do you now agree that your ministry may be responsible for a serious and major breach of privacy protection for Ontario citizens?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, we are very, very confident that the privacy of Ontarians is secure based upon the contractual agreement we came to with the company that was awarded the contract. I'll repeat what I said. The obligations are very clear. They agreed to it. They signed off on it. They need to keep the records secure. They need to prevent any loss, any misuse, any unauthorized access, any disclosure, alteration or destruction of the records themselves. They cannot directly or indirectly use, collect or disclose any personal information—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member has reached the point where he is now warned—the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

Finish, please.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, may I say to all the members of the Legislature, we are very confident that the privacy of Ontarians who are using that system is indeed secure. That is something that's an absolute priority for us. It will follow the freedom of information, privacy and protection act.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Yesterday the United Nations special rapporteur on food security raised concerns about hunger and food bank use in Canada. He called Canada's social protection system "broken" and

urged governments to make sure "the poorest families are not obliged to sacrifice food in order to pay for ... housing." Can the minister, under these circumstances, explain to struggling families why his government is cutting the community start-up and maintenance benefit, which helps people on social assistance faced with emergency moving or repair costs?

Hon. John Milloy: As I've said before in this House, I don't think any member or any party has a monopoly on concern for those who are marginalized in the province of Ontario. We recognize the fact that we need a major transformation of our social assistance system, which is why we have taken a number of very important steps, including the appointment of Frances Lankin, a highly respected former member of this Legislature and a former minister, and Munir Sheikh, to take a look at the social assistance system.

On the housing system, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the work that my ministry has been doing in the Ministry of Housing in terms of bundling together and transferring a number of programs aimed at homelessness and preventing homelessness and giving municipalities the flexibility they need so that they can provide support where it's needed. As part of that, we are taking a portion of the CSUMB program and adding it to that program where it makes sense and gives the flexibility that's needed.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I can't believe that the minister is proud of cutting funds to people on social assistance. That's sad; it's shameful. He should be ashamed, not proud.

Thousands of families on social assistance are losing—and this is how much they're losing—up to \$1,500 in emergency support every two years. This money helps people who face unforeseen events—like bed bug infestations, hospitalization, even those escaping domestic violence—that force them to move or pay for repairs.

People from London to Sudbury to Sault Ste. Marie are emailing us, protesting this unnecessary and harsh cut. They want to know: How does taking hundreds of dollars away from families who can barely afford a roof over their heads or food on the table constitute a step forward?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, we are undertaking one of the most significant reviews of social assistance that has been done in decades.

I think I've noted here, Mr. Speaker, during the last election being asked to go to a round table on poverty with other candidates. I looked through the New Democratic Party platform four times until I could find the three sentences at the bottom of their platform that talked about—guess what?—the review of social assistance that we're taking and the fact that they're looking forward to it.

Our government's record when it comes to supporting the most vulnerable—through work that we've done in terms of the Ontario child benefit; in terms of the student nutrition program, which supports over 600,000 children;

through the hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars that we've put into supportive housing; through the new, innovative long-term housing strategy we're putting forward—I am proud of our record and I am proud of the work that we'll be doing as the commission reports in the next month or two.

GREENBELT

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a question today for the Minister of the Environment. We saw a new study that was released on Wednesday. It's showing that jobs are just flourishing across the greenbelt. The resource-rich region of Ontario is more than just green space and vibrant countryside; it's also a major and considerable contributor to the job market in this province. The greenbelt has got over 1.8 million acres of green space, it's got farmland, vibrant communities, forests, wetlands, watersheds, and they are all permanently protected now under this world-leading legislation.

But, Speaker, what I want to know through you: I'm wondering if the minister could please speak to the details of the report that was released on Wednesday, which was prepared by the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm pleased to share that with the House. I want to first of all take the opportunity to convey our appreciation to the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation for the very important work they do of promoting greenbelt-grown food, helping greenbelt farmers implement environmental farm plans and publicizing recreation opportunities on the greenbelt.

The greenbelt has been globally recognized as a successful land use planning model, and now I'm pleased to say we can add successful economic model to the list of greenbelt accomplishments. The study was released yesterday, and it found the total economic impact of greenbelt-associated activity exceeds \$9.1 billion annually province-wide, and \$1.5 billion of that economic activity takes place in Niagara. Some 161,000 full-time equivalent jobs in sectors such as agriculture and tourism are dependent on the greenbelt.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the minister for that response.

The same study goes on to show that the greenbelt, with its 1.8 million acres of protected farmland and green space, is not only the greater Golden Horseshoe's bread basket, but it also proves to be a key economic driver. The report identifies that farmland is one of the leading land use classifications within that greenbelt. More than half the greenbelt is used for agriculture, and we find out now we've got over 7,000 farms, primarily because of ideal farming conditions, that can be found on the greenbelt itself.

Speaker, again through you: Would the minister please speak to the role that agriculture plays in the economic success of the greenbelt here in Ontario?

Hon. James J. Bradley: The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm very proud to applaud the continued vitality and growth of greenbelt farms, businesses and communities important to the Ontario economy. Many greenbelt-grown foods are available in grocery stores, farmers' markets and restaurants. The greenbelt is indeed providing a source of fresh local food to Ontario consumers, which research tells us Ontarians prefer and tend to purchase over other products.

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Our government is very proud of the strong work of greenbelt farmers, municipalities, food processors and businesses. I'm going to join the Minister of the Environment in thanking the greenbelt foundation for this study, which showcases the economic contributions to the provincial economy—\$9.1 billion—by ordinary, everyday farmers.

HEALTHY SCHOOLS

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Minister, I'm sure you've seen the video by two students from Brampton. In that video, Brian Baah and Samuel Battista, who are present in the gallery today, offer a very important message. These two young adults provide an informative yet funny presentation on how their freedom of choice has been violated by this Liberal government. Brian and Samuel are two of the students you have denied precisely the food options which are available to you and your Liberal colleagues every day, right here in the Legislature.

Minister, why are you denying students—who in some cases are old enough to vote and join the armed forces to fight and die for this great country—the freedom to buy the same foods you can buy?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Children in Ontario deserve the best start in life. Childhood obesity is reaching epidemic proportions, not only here in Ontario but in Canada and around the Western world. We are convinced that the policy of healthy foods in our schools is good for kids.

Interjection: Nutritional guidelines.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We follow nutritional guidelines, my colleague reminds me. So, Mr. Speaker, we don't agree with your guests who are here in the House. We don't agree with you. We're not going to change the policy. We choose, in fact, to make sure our children have healthy choices, and those healthy choices include apples that are grown on Ontario farms. They include all kinds of healthy choices, part of Foodland Ontario.

Instead of protecting cheeseburgers, protect Ontario farms. Sell apples and other fruits that are grown right here in Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Minister, the cafeteria in the Catholic high school in Trenton has closed due to the lack of sales since your new policy was implemented. The TDSB has suggested they have already lost \$700,000 in cafeteria revenue, money that went towards school

trips, sports equipment, and arts and music programs. The Toronto Catholic board has said they are considering closing their cafeterias—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm hearing shouting back and forth while the question is being asked.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would like the Attorney General to listen. I'm hearing shouting back and forth, even when the question is being asked. Thank you.

Finish your question, please.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: [*Inaudible*] closing their cafeterias. The Premier has indicated he doesn't care. So your so-called food choice program eliminates students' ability to make conscious and independent choices for themselves.

The Ontario PC Party believes in empowering students and educating them on healthy choices, not dictating to them what they can and cannot eat. Minister, before more cafeteria workers are fired, before more students are forced off school grounds to eat lunch, will you do the—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I think this is the new Tory white paper, Pathways to Obesity.

Mr. Speaker, we completely disagree with you. To those creative young people here, we don't agree with them. You may be the party of cheeseburgers; we're the party of healthy kids and healthy lifestyles.

I hope those young people will turn their creative juices to extolling the virtues of Ontario-grown fruits and vegetables. I hope they will turn their creative juices to produce a video on the benefits of milk that's produced right here in Ontario. I hope they will make a YouTube video that urges people to eat chicken that is produced right here in Ontario.

The party of cheeseburgers and whitewash, we have to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Order, please.

I did hear a few comments that were very dangerously close to unparliamentary, and I couldn't identify the individuals. So I would recommend very carefully of the type of language that gets said in this place.

Having said that, it's now time for the next question.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for—

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Kenora–Rainy River.

Interjection: Kenora–Rainy River.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let's all do that together: Kenora–Rainy River.

Interjections: Kenora–Rainy River.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. About a

month ago, I asked the Minister of Natural Resources why he decided to take jobs out of Ontario and outsource them to Tennessee. The answer to that question was not satisfactory.

Since that time, people across the province have raised serious concerns relating to the privacy of information that is collected and stored in the United States and subject to their privacy laws. This morning, I shared those concerns with the privacy commissioner and have urged an investigation.

Why are Ontarians losing out on jobs because services are being sold off to companies in other countries, all while putting our privacy at risk?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Again, I appreciate the opportunity to clarify the situation. The fact is that the contract was awarded in a fair and competitive procurement process to a company in Tennessee to help us automate a system to provide licences to anglers and hunters in a more efficient and faster way and a way, that allows them to access it from their home, from ServiceOntario centres, from a number of issuers.

In terms of the privacy issue, again, I want to provide real assurance that the company that was awarded the contract is contractually obligated to follow Ontario's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. They cannot in any way, directly or indirectly, use, collect or disclose any personal information. The fact is, if indeed the privacy commissioner chooses to investigate this or look into this, we will welcome, obviously, the comments of the privacy commissioner, but we feel very confident that the privacy of Ontarians is secure.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: There's close to 600,000 people out of work in this province, and now more jobs that could very well be performed by people in this province as a public service have been outsourced to the United States for profit. Ontarians have to call a number in Tennessee to get their Outdoors Card, fishing licence, and to report their wild turkey hunt. Even the moose tag draw happens in Tennessee.

Given the fact that we've had many complaints about the moose tag draw, Minister, do you think the fact that this draw happens in Tennessee will increase their confidence?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: The fact is that the Outdoors Card centre is still in Peterborough. Our Ministry of Natural Resources people are still in charge of that process. They're still doing that. The company in Tennessee that was awarded that contract is working, in terms of the vendors and the machines, to help make the licensing process run in a more efficient fashion. There are by no means significant jobs attached to that. We are still very much in control of the Outdoors centre and our MNR offices in Peterborough.

The fact is that, indeed, we've got 730,000 licences that have been issued. We are very, very pleased about the fact that, now, a system is in place that is going to be easier and more efficient for people to access and get

their cards. Indeed, I do not think those concerns are warranted.

PAN AM GAMES

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: My question today is for the minister responsible for the Pan Am Games.

Minister, during the next three years, the games will be one of the largest economic drivers in the Golden Horseshoe. The games will create thousands of jobs, and the long-term community benefit will be felt across Ontario and in my wonderful riding of Pickering-Scarborough East, the host of the state-of-the-art aquatics facility at the University of Toronto Scarborough campus. This will be a legacy long-term training facility; it's not a two-week event.

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My constituents have asked about the Pan Am budget. They want to know how much the games will cost and how the plans are progressing. Minister, what's the status of the 2015 Pan Am and Parapan Am Games budget?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you to the member for Pickering-Scarborough East for her question. She is correct: Many were anxious for this update, and none more so than me.

Ontario is proud to be hosting the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games, and we look forward to welcoming athletes and officials from over 41 countries to Toronto and Ontario. The games will create, indeed, 15,000 jobs and showcase Ontario as a great place to visit, invest and do business. As the member correctly mentioned, it will be one of the largest economic drivers in the region over the next three years.

Together with Toronto 2015, we recently released the updated Pan Am and Parapan American Games budget. The overall budget remains unchanged at \$1.449 billion, and the government of Ontario's commitment remains at \$500 million. The federal government is also committing \$500 million.

I'm very pleased that the games are moving ahead well and they are on track.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: I know my constituents of Pickering-Scarborough East are very excited about the opportunity to host the games set to be played at the U of T Scarborough campus.

While we're all looking forward to watching the games and cheering everyone on, we know that organizing the games is an enormous undertaking. Knowing this, it's especially important we do everything possible to manage the costs.

Minister, what steps are being taken to deliver the games on budget and manage any risk? How will Ontarians be kept up to date as the planning process proceeds?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you again to the member.

We recognize the importance of budget oversight, and I take that responsibility very seriously. As of March 31, 2012, 3.7% of the total 2015 Pan Am Parapan American Games budget has been spent. The majority of the budget

will be spent in 2014 and 2015, and the organizing committee is taking extra steps to contain those costs by reducing the footprint of the games through venue clustering.

We're also pleased that there's an \$82-million contingency reserve in the operating budget. We're implementing strict financial reporting and risk management processes. Moreover, 2015 has committed to providing ongoing public status reports, including budget updates, beginning this fall.

I'm pleased to say that the budget has been reviewed and confirmed by independent third party auditors and financial experts.

The people's games, Mr. Speaker, will be an enormous social and economic benefit for the whole province.

RED TAPE REDUCTION

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Deputy Premier, you know the challenges that businesses face in Ontario today: a \$16-billion deficit, soaring energy costs, and a red tape burden that takes \$11 billion out of our economy each year.

This afternoon, you and your party will have the opportunity to support my private members' bill that takes real, legislated action to tackle the red tape burden in Ontario. It's my belief that we can face this challenge together and head on and help clear the way for job creators to not just survive, but thrive.

I'm asking you, Deputy Premier: Will you support this important bill, Bill 62, the Legislative Oversight of Regulations Act?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Members on this side of the House, in private members' hour, all vote the way they see fit. I applaud the member for his initiative, and I look forward to hearing the debate this afternoon to see where that goes.

But I want to know why the member won't allow the southwest economic development fund to get approval. When I think of Chatham and Blenheim and Leamington, which are all in that member's riding—instead of standing up for Chatham, instead of standing up for Blenheim, instead of standing up for the good people of Chatham-Kent-Essex, he stands back. That region has gone through a number of challenges related to the economy. We've worked to bring investments. We've created the new southwest fund. I hope the member opposite will stop ringing the bells and start speaking for his constituents, many of whom I've heard from, who want this fund passed.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you very much, Deputy Premier. I still remain optimistic that we can address this challenge, but your response does disappoint our small business owners. One such employer tells me that he spends hours filling out redundant paperwork for trucks at his building shop in London with information the government already has.

It's 2012. Unemployment is still above the national average. CFIB says that we're still seeing billions drained from our economy through hundreds of thousands of regulations and red tape. And now we have to factor in credit rating downgrades from Moody's and Standard and Poor's.

So, Deputy Premier, I ask you again, will you encourage your members to stand up and support legislative action against this crippling red tape that holds back Ontario businesses?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would like to remind the member opposite about our Open for Business initiative, which the Canadian Federation of Independent Business gave us a B minus on. They welcomed it.

Here's what it did: It reduced the red tape and regulatory burden by 17% and eliminated 80,000 regulatory burdens. That B minus was a higher grade than the previous Conservative government got in their initiatives.

We also harmonized the sales tax and had the largest regulatory reduction in the history of the province. That party voted against it, Mr. Speaker. Their federal colleagues had the good sense to support it, both with cash and with moral support.

So to the member opposite, I hope you will vote for the southwest Ontario economic development fund so that we can work with the greenhouse growers in southern Ontario, we can work with the automotive manufacturers and automotive parts suppliers that are laced between Windsor and London, and many who are in Chatham-Kent-Essex.

Our plan is working. It's the right plan. I urge the member—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

ACCESS TO PUBLIC LANDS

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. CLUAH was intended to serve as MNR's poster child for turning large tracts of land in northern Ontario into a model for tourism development, but citizens' committees tasked with providing input in the limited instances of consultation weigh heavily on the side of special-interest groups, and the public cannot participate. As a result, people in Wawa, Gogama, Massey, Hornepayne and Dubreuilville, to name a few, have seen public access to lands severely restricted in areas that have been available to them for generations.

Minister, when will this government respect and recognize the rights of citizens of Ontario and ensure fair access to our natural resources?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I very much appreciate the question from my colleague. The fact is, Ontarians have tremendous access to crown land. The vast majority of crown land has no restrictions at all. We are really fortunate, I think, to have a free land use policy where people can enjoy all kinds of activities in terms of our crown land.

But in the interests of Ontarians' safety, not all crown access roads can always remain open. I think the member knows that. When forestry access roads, for example, are built and companies are no longer accessing them, it's difficult to maintain them and keep them safe for travel. I think the member, again, will understand that. Crown roads are then only closed to vehicles and remain open to Ontarians who want to enjoy outside activities.

Certainly we are always open to more discussions about this, but the fact is, we are very lucky to have a free land use policy in the province of Ontario and—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Minister, I need to remind you that the long weekend is upon us, hunting season is around the corner, and constituents in my riding are looking for answers—also in northern Ontario.

MNR is preventing public access on roads bordering crown lands simply because a remote tourism operator has a lot on a huge lake. The Public Lands Act, section 3, outlines that 25% or more of crown land that borders a lake must be reserved for public use. By ignoring its obligation to the people of Ontario, MNR has created a two-tier system of access to our shared resources.

What right does MNR have to violate the law and to restrict the access of traditional users to those lands but allow access to only the privileged few?

1130

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Again, I do appreciate the question. I want to say, again, that Ontarians have extraordinary access to crown land, and the vast majority of crown land has no restrictions at all. There are some cases, I will obviously acknowledge, where access to crown land is restricted, to help create and build strong local economies by supporting Ontario's remote tourism industry, and that's about us always trying to find a balance. Even at that stage, crown lands are only really closed to vehicles and remain open to Ontarians to enjoy outside activities in these remote areas and to get there.

I'm certainly very happy to have a further conversation with the member about this, but I think he'd be very, very pleased with the open access to Ontario's crown lands that all Ontarians enjoy.

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Attorney General. It's important to bring to light the extraordinary challenges that everyday Ontarians face after being victims of crime, and the Attorney General spoke last month of the importance of victim of crime awareness.

Many of us in this House know someone who has been a victim of crime, some more serious than others. For many, it is often a long and difficult road back to recovery. As the member for York-South Weston, I am aware that victims of crime rely on friends and family for support during these difficult times, although sometimes

the support of loved ones is not enough and can often put strain on even the strongest of bonds.

Acknowledging these challenges is an important demonstration to those who have been victimized by crime, and the government has a responsibility to help on the road back to recovery. What measures are we putting in place as a government?

Hon. John Gerretsen: National Victims of Crime Awareness Week is a very important part of our whole criminal justice system, and the services that are provided for victims of crime are certainly light years ahead of where they used to be 20 or 30 years ago.

The work that our ministry and government does for victims of crime includes delivering innovative support programs and making it easier for victims and families to seek the justice they deserve. I'll just give you a couple of examples.

Victim crisis assistance and referral services work closely with local police. VCARS staff and volunteers help victims and provide much-needed support. Last year, you may be interested in knowing, 71,000 individuals—our neighbours, friends and loved ones—were helped by VCARS. More recently, we launched the Family Court support worker program, which helps victims of domestic violence who are involved in the family law process.

As well, the Office for Victims of Crime released a handbook, which is very useful as well in that regard.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Mr. Speaker, my next question is again for the Attorney General. The needs of victims of crime need to be addressed in a fulsome manner. I'm proud to live in a province and to be part of a government that shows compassion, courtesy and respect for all crime victims.

But a prevalent reality for victims is not to proactively seek the community supports that are available to them. In most cases, especially at the outset, victims or loved ones of victims are too distraught to effectively learn about victim programs that can help them. In other cases, some are initially in denial of the potential impacts of being a victim and don't bother to seek help. Having a good victim support system is one thing, but if victims aren't using it, what is the use of having it? How are we creating an appropriate and effective link?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I know that the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services is looking forward to answering this question.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you for this very important question. It's absolutely necessary that we help victims get back on their feet in the aftermath of a crime. That's why my ministry has recently worked with police and victim service providers to strengthen the police guideline for victim assistance.

We have streamlined the process to ensure victims are connected quickly to the support services available in their communities. Now, not only are police officers

providing victim services information to victims; they are also providing victim-related information on a timely basis to the appropriate community agency unless the victim especially declines this assistance.

Today I want to thank the AG for releasing this handbook, *Living Beyond the Murder of a Loved One: Information for Families and Others Affected by Homicide*.

MINISTRY GRANTS

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. I want to read a quote from a local newspaper, attributed to the mayor of the municipality of Bluewater upon receiving \$7.5 million: "I still wake up at night, wondering if this is going to happen," he said." The March 22 article goes on to say that, "Unlike most funding, the municipality didn't apply through a grant application but was approached by the province."

Minister, is this standard practice?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: We're very proud of our rural economic development program and the funds that we've been able to provide to municipalities. My understanding is that this project will support economic development in the Bluewater area, and that's good. If the member opposite is anxious to not see that money extended to that municipality, perhaps she could get the council to say that they don't want it, but I doubt very much that's going to happen.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you, Minister, four years ago, right before an election, the Minister of Citizenship was caught shovelling money out the door, like the million-dollar cricket club grant, without bothering with things like applications or accountability.

The reckless use of taxpayers' money doesn't stop there. The previous Minister of Agriculture signed the formal agreement with the municipality of Bluewater and you amended it less than two months later to rush the cash out the door, and took reporting and accountability measures out of the agreement. Minister, something isn't right. The ministry never announced this money and reportedly had the municipality sign a confidentiality agreement. Will you ask the auditor to look into this, or, if you have details of the grant, share them with the people in the Legislature?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm a little confused. This is the party opposite that wanted to stop the uploading to the province. This is the party opposite that, in the election campaign, wouldn't stand in their place and make a commitment to municipalities like Bluewater. Our government is proud of the strategic investments that we've made in the municipality of Bluewater in support of the economic development in that region.

This area has faced significant barriers. I'll tell you, notwithstanding the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All of you, come to order.

Finish, please.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: —mischievousness of the question, they were very, very pleased to get the money.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton Mountain on a point of order.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just quickly like to introduce my daughter, Destinee, to the House today. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We absolutely know that that's not a point of order, but we do absolutely welcome your daughter for being here.

Don't go away with any bad impressions.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would want to use that moment to also say to this House at this time that this is the last day for our pages. As I have always done, and I even heckled that we should make them stay, they have to be on, so I think we should show our appreciation for the wonderful work that they've done. To all our pages: Thank you.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have to make a quick editorial. I was told that this is the brightest group that we've ever had here during this time period.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I can add that they have great taste in vocals and music.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There is no deferred vote. This House stands recessed till 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1139 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome some people from my area. Chris Braney is the CEO for the Durham Alzheimer Society. Chris is in the members' gallery, along with Janelle Bush, who is from my home riding but is working in Durham for the summer. Also, we have Laura Hare, who is the executive director of the Belleville-Hastings Alzheimer Society and my old golf partner; and Linda Jackson is the executive director of the Prince Edward County Alzheimer Society. We have Sharon Osvold, as well, who is an Alzheimer's caregiver. Welcome to the Legislature. It's great to have you here.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: It's my great honour to welcome to the Legislature a number of guests who are on hand today to lend their voices for the support of Bill 81, Inherited Heart Rhythm Disorders Awareness Act, 2012. We have Blake Hurst, founder of Parents Advocating for Cardiac Education; Mary Lewis, vice-president of research, advocacy and health promotion, Ontario, for the Heart and Stroke Foundation; Dr. Joel A. Kirsh,

pediatric cardiologist for the Hospital for Sick Children; and Alan and Debbie Corrance. Welcome to Queen's Park, and thank you so much for being here.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to introduce Connor Maitland, who is here. He's the brother of page Carley Maitland. Actually, Connor was a page here six years ago. Welcome, Connor.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All in the family.

The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, there is—and I'm embarrassed to say this, because I've lost my note. The parents and friends of lesbians and gays are here today, having a reception this afternoon. I don't have the note with me with the time and the room.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's 4:30, room 230.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's 4:30, room 230. I want to thank my friend from Parkdale-High Park. It would be very wonderful if a number of us would show up.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That heckling, I'll accept.

Further introductions? Members' statements. Oh, is that an introduction—

Mr. David Zimmer: Yes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Willowdale for an introduction.

Mr. David Zimmer: Thank you, Speaker. I was just a little slow on my feet there.

I would like to introduce some members of the Ontario Museum Association. They are Marie Lalonde, who is the executive director; and Yves Théoret, who is the vice-president, the managing director, and he has special responsibilities for the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We welcome our guests.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PFLAG CANADA

Mrs. Jane McKenna: It is my honour to rise today in the House, on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, to recognize PFLAG Canada, Canada's only national organization that helps all Canadians who are struggling with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Irene Miller, president of Toronto PFLAG, is here at Queen's Park today, along with Helen Kennedy, executive director of Egale Canada, to recognize and stand in support of International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia.

PFLAG Canada offers support for LBGT individuals and also for parents when sons and daughters come out. PFLAG Canada educates and provides resources to parents, families, friends and colleagues with questions or concerns 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

All people, whatever their path in life, have a right to equal treatment without discrimination because of gender

identity or gender. When it comes down to it, reaching the full potential of who you are as an individual is really about fully experiencing the authentic you. It's about being secure in yourself and living your story. On this journey, PFLAG offers valuable support. The organization is there to help all those who are navigating these issues in a world that doesn't always make room for diversity.

REMIX PROJECT

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I would like to acknowledge the phenomenal work an organization in my riding is doing for at-risk youth in communities across Toronto.

The Remix Project, which has offices in Liberty Village, is empowering young people from some of Toronto's most impoverished areas through the arts. By providing training and partnering with groups such as Music Canada, the Remix Project gives at-risk youth an entry point into a myriad of creative fields, including graphic design, illustration, fashion design, videography, photography, writing, music recording and film.

Organizations like the Remix Project remind us that our most impoverished communities are not a liability but an incredible reservoir of untapped potential. The artists who graduate from this organization are proof that investing in our less-privileged young people not only yields a great return on investment but also trains young professionals who can share their skills with other members of their communities.

It was a great honour to tour the Remix Project and meet the members of this organization, many of them graduates of their own program, but it is an even bigger honour to know that they are changing the lives of so many people by doing their work in my riding.

UNITED BAKERS DAIRY RESTAURANT

Mr. Mike Colle: This month, an incredible, iconic landmark in Toronto and in my riding, the United Bakers restaurant, is celebrating 100 years. UB, as it's called, used to be on Dundas, then it moved to Spadina, and now it's in my riding at Bathurst and Lawrence.

It is really the heart and soul of the Jewish community in Toronto. If you haven't been there, you're not Jewish. You have to go there. You meet everybody: judges, mayors, schleppers. You meet Toronto's Toronto people.

They have incredible pea soup—the best in all of the globe—bagels, the scrambled eggs, the coffee, the blintzes.

It is a true meeting place where people will argue, yell at each other, hug each other—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just like this place.

Mr. Mike Colle: But the food is much better there at the United Bakers Dairy Restaurant.

It is owned by the Ladovsky family that came from Poland in 1912. They put their heart and soul—in fact, they were part of the union movement. They organized

the confectionary workers on Spadina back in the old days.

Anyway, if you want to really say you've visited Toronto, you have to go to the United Bakers Dairy Restaurant. You're always welcome, but make sure you're not on a diet. Go there any time.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm very hungry. Thank you.

Member from Sarnia-Lambton.

CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

Mr. Robert Bailey: I as well, Speaker.

The Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services is taking a dangerous risk with the safety of corrections officers and inmates at the Sarnia Jail. The ministry is overcrowding the Sarnia Jail and is now operating this facility at 145% capacity. Inmates are being stuffed three to a cell and forced to sleep on the floor in day areas outside of regular cells. At the same time, the ministry has left the jail critically understaffed and important security roles are being left unfilled.

In the event of an emergency, this understaffing jeopardizes both the safety of staff on duty and the safety of the inmates themselves. The local jail guards' union has written to the minister's office, saying, "We are in serious trouble here. Hopefully no one gets killed or injured because of the lack of staff."

The inevitable outcome of overcrowding in the Sarnia Jail will be a tragedy. At larger facilities like London's Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre, where violence is rampant, overcrowding has been cited in numerous lawsuits, two coroners' inquests and a homicide investigation.

The Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services must act now to address the dangerous conditions they've created at the Sarnia Jail before there is an incident leading to serious injury or loss of life.

ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION

Mr. Michael Mantha: Today I would like to highlight the important work of the Royal Canadian Legions. Across my riding, this province and this country, Legions are working hard at making our communities a better place. As one of Canada's largest community-based service organizations, who have contributed millions of dollars in volunteer hours, I want to thank them for all that they do.

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I have had the opportunity to attend many events this year sponsored by the Legions. I recently attended their public speaking competition. Important initiatives like this are key in the development of self-confidence in our youth.

I am looking forward to this week, when my wife and I will become associate members of Legion Branch 561—and I encourage you all to do so in your communities.

I am proud to say that family members of mine have served in the Canadian military and served in World War II.

I also want to send my thoughts and prayers to Comrade Manuel from Legion Branch 561 and his family. Comrade Manuel is undergoing triple bypass surgery today and is presently in intensive care. His fellow legionnaires, friends and I wish for a speedy recovery.

Thank you to all the men and women in the Royal Canadian Legion for your hard work and dedication in making our society a better place.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm pleased to share that now more children will have access to mental health services in Peel region.

Last week, the Minister of Children and Youth Services joined me at Associated Youth Services of Peel to announce funding that will help create a more coordinated and responsive mental health care system in Peel region.

In a May 9 editorial, the Toronto Star wrote, "Without proper health services and community support, childhood mental illness can stress families to the breaking point. Children drop out of school, wind up in homeless shelters or, worse still, the prison system." I agree.

The federal government should implement the recommendations of the Mental Health Commission of Canada without delay.

The Peel region can do even better as our government is now funding to the Peel region proportional to its population.

I commend Associated Youth Services of Peel for their hard work and dedication.

WASTE DIVERSION

Mr. Michael Harris: Recently, the Minister of the Environment chose to make businesses pay for the Liberal government's failure to properly manage waste diversion in Ontario.

Last year, the Liberal government idly stood by, allowing Stewardship Ontario to rack up massive deficits in eight of the nine phase 1 hazardous waste categories it manages.

Now, the Minister of the Environment is forcing businesses to clean up the Liberal government's financial mess by charging additional fees for his deficit recovery plan. With no regard for accountability, the minister rushed these changes through the back door and is now hiding behind a complex layer of bureaucracy involving Stewardship Ontario and Waste Diversion Ontario. As a result, companies like Monarch Oil in Kitchener-Waterloo have received bills from Stewardship Ontario with recycling fee increases reaching as much as 120%.

Businesses must do their part to help promote recycling, yes, but they should not have to finance multi-

million dollar deficits which are the result of bad policy decisions by this government.

Clearly, Ontario's waste diversion apparatus is broken. When businesses are just handed a bill by a government-assisted monopoly with little to no explanation, something has got to change.

We've all seen what happens when governments and the agencies they are responsible for operate under a shroud of secrecy. You end up with Ornge.

It's time that the Liberal government recognizes that the only way to move waste diversion forward in Ontario is to establish proper oversight of the recycling program.

MUSEUMS

Mr. David Zimmer: I rise today on behalf of the Ontario Museum Association to recognize Museum Month and International Museum Day on May 18—that's tomorrow. It's a time when museums around the world and in Ontario celebrate their important role in building vibrant, livable communities where authentic learning experiences are enjoyed by all visitors.

During the summer season and throughout the year, Ontario's 600 museums, art galleries and historic sites will welcome about 19 million visitors, providing a real exploration of Ontario's heritage.

Ontario's museums act as catalysts for tourism and innovation in our province. This year is especially important because of the War of 1812 commemoration activities.

Across Ontario, the museum sector employs 8,000 professionals and 16,000 volunteers who create these outstanding programs and visitor experiences.

On International Museum Day on May 18, I encourage everyone in Ontario in every city and town to visit a museum in Ontario of your choice; in fact, visit several.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Ted Arnott: On behalf of the people of Wellington-Halton Hills, I want to thank the Minister of Transportation for his decision to cancel alternative 4-3 of the GTA West Corridor study. Sometimes the wheels of government move slowly, but other times they move at breathtaking speed. On Tuesday, I tabled a resolution calling on the minister to announce that he was ending further consideration of alternative 4-3. Less than 24 hours after that resolution was tabled, the minister decided to deal with the issue, and yesterday he initiated a meeting with the mayor of Halton Hills to deliver the good news.

I want to thank the countless individuals who have worked so tirelessly to bring about this resolution: the town of Halton Hills council, Halton regional council, and members of CRASHH, especially Wendy Bruchal, for all the work that they have done. This victory belongs to them.

For almost a year, my staff and I have worked hard to bring attention to the issue in this House. In September, I

outlined a 10-point plan of the steps I wanted to take. One by one, we checked off the points before Christmas. I have raised it on multiple occasions in this House. I have written and spoken directly to both the Premier and the Minister of Transportation, drafted a petition, and pushed for a briefing with senior staff at the Ministry of Transportation.

Over the past year, we've all worked so hard to bring about this conclusion. I want to congratulate my constituents for working together to put an end to alternative 4-3.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CONDOMINIUM AMENDMENT ACT (RECOVERY OF COMMON EXPENSES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES CONDOMINIUMS (RECOURS DES DÉPENSES COMMUNES)

Mr. Sergio moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 95, An Act to amend the Condominium Act, 1998 with respect to the recovery of common expenses / *Projet de loi 95, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur les condominiums en ce qui a trait au recouvrement des dépenses communes.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Yes, indeed, Speaker. I have a very short explanatory note.

The bill amends the Condominium Act, 1998. The amendments provide that if an owner of a condominium unit defaults in the obligation to contribute to the common expenses, a mortgagee of the unit is liable to pay the amount that is unpaid by the owner, and other related costs.

ELECTRONIC COMMERCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE COMMERCE ÉLECTRONIQUE

Mr. Smith moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 96, An Act to amend the Electronic Commerce Act, 2000 / *Projet de loi 96, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur le commerce électronique.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Todd Smith: The bill amends the Electronic Commerce Act, 2000, and removes the current exemption from the act for documents, including agreements of purchase and sale, that create or transfer interest in land and require registration to be effective against third parties. However, those documents are subject to the requirements of subsection 11(3) of the act relating to the reliability of electronic signatures.

It will remove a lot of red tape that real estate agents are facing these days. I'm happy to present this with my co-sponsor from Ottawa Centre.

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PETITIONS

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas a report from Ontario's Auditor General on the province's air ambulance service, Ornge, found a web of questionable financial deals where tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars have been wasted and public safety compromised;

"Whereas Ornge officials created a 'mini-conglomerate' of private entities that enriched former senior officers and left taxpayers on the hook for \$300 million in debt;

"Whereas government funding for Ornge climbed 20% to \$700 million, while the number of patients it airlifted actually declined;

"Whereas a subsidiary of Ornge bought the head office building in Mississauga for just over \$15 million and then leased it back to Ornge at a rate 40% higher than fair market rent;

"Whereas the Liberal Minister of Health completely failed in her duty to provide proper oversight of Ornge;

"Whereas this latest scandal follows the eHealth boondoggle where over \$2 billion in health dollars were wasted;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government of Ontario immediately appoint a special all-party select committee to investigate the scandals surrounding Ornge."

These petition names were collected at a home show that I did in the riding. I'm pleased to affix my name to it and give it to page Dia.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Nickel Belt.

"Whereas there are a growing number of reported cases of abuse, neglect and substandard care for our seniors in long-term-care homes; and

"Whereas people with complaints have limited options, and frequently don't complain because they fear

repercussions, which suggests too many seniors are being left in vulnerable situations without independent oversight; and

"Whereas Ontario is one of only two provinces in Canada where the Ombudsman does not have independent oversight of long-term-care homes. We need accountability, transparency and consistency in our long-term-care home system;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to expand the Ombudsman's mandate to include Ontario's long-term-care homes in order to protect our most vulnerable seniors."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Georgia to bring it to the Clerk.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is in serious need of modernization;

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is not in harmony with all the following acts, regulations, guidelines and codes: the Occupational Health and Safety Act of Ontario, the radiation protection regulations of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, the safety codes of Health Canada and the radiation protection guidelines of the International Commission on Radiological Protection;

"Whereas dental hygienists need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by Reza Moridi, the member from Richmond Hill, that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations, make recommendations on how to modernize this act, and bring it to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I fully agree with this petition, I sign it and pass it down to page Sabrina.

CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

Mr. Robert Bailey: I rise today to present this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the proposed closure of the Sarnia Jail will impact 76 employees and result in a loss of over \$6 million to the local Sarnia-Lambton community; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government states that the Sarnia Jail is underutilized while in fact it is currently at 105% capacity; and

"Whereas there are no costs currently associated with transporting inmates from the Sarnia Jail to the Sarnia courthouse, and transporting inmates from Windsor to Sarnia will greatly increase costs"—and safety—"costs which may become a burden to the city of Sarnia and thus local taxpayers; and

"Whereas the mayor, local OPP, the Sarnia police chief, the RCMP, aboriginal police, First Nations chiefs and the Canadian border services were not consulted prior to the Sarnia Jail closure announcement, and if closed, Sarnia would become the busiest border crossing in Ontario without a jail;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the McGuinty Liberal government immediately conduct a public review of the Sarnia Jail and make that cost-benefit analysis available to the public prior to its closure."

I agree with this, will sign it and send it down with Katarina.

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is in serious need of modernization;

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is not in harmony with all the following acts, regulations, guidelines and codes: the Occupational Health and Safety Act of Ontario, the radiation protection regulations of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, the safety codes of Health Canada and the radiation protection guidelines of the International Commission on Radiological Protection;

"Whereas dental hygienists need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by Dr. Reza Moridi, the member from Richmond Hill, that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations, make recommendations on how to modernize this act, and bring it to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I agree with this petition, will sign it and send it to the table with page Noah.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Todd Smith: This was forwarded to me from some concerned residents in the St. Catharines area.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is a growing body of evidence confirming industrial wind development has serious adverse effects on host communities;

"Whereas" hundreds of people "in Ontario have reported serious negative health effects from industrial wind development, and" dozens of "families have been bought out of their homes;

"Whereas Ontario's Green Energy Act has ended local planning control by stripping municipal councils of their rights;

"Whereas" more than "80 municipal councils, representing" more than "two million Ontarians, called on the government to put in place a full moratorium on industrial wind development until an independent epidemiological health study is completed, proper environmental regulations and protections are put in place, and local democracy is restored;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Immediately put a moratorium on all industrial wind proposals; fund an independent epidemiological health study to develop safe setbacks; legislate those findings; develop stringent environmental protection standards for natural areas; and require all projects to comply with regulations based on science and local planning."

I agree with this petition, will sign it and send it to the table with Shaumik.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mr. Jonah Schein: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas diesel trains are a health hazard for people who live near them;

"Whereas more toxic fumes will be created by the 400 daily trains than the car trips they are meant to replace;

"Whereas the planned air-rail link does not serve the communities through which it passes and will be priced beyond the reach of most commuters;

"Whereas all major cities in the world with train service between their downtown core and the airport use electric trains;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario stop building the air-rail link for diesel and move to electrify the route immediately;

"That the air-rail link be designed, operated and priced as an affordable transportation option between all points along its route."

I agree with this petition. I will affix my name to it and give it to page Ranbir.

CELLULAR TRANSMISSION EQUIPMENT

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a petition signed by a number of people in my riding of Oakville. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the operation of cellular commercial transmission equipment on new or existing cell towers has been proposed near residential areas in Oakville and other communities around the province; and

"Whereas Industry Canada has ultimate authority to approve the location of cellular communications transmission equipment under the federal Radiocommunication Act; and

"Whereas the province of Ontario has no jurisdiction in the placement of cell communications, equipment or services; and

"Whereas many area residents and local elected officials have expressed concerns with the location due to its proximity to residential areas;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario request that the government of Canada review the siting of cellular commercial communications transmission equipment in residential areas; and

"That the province of Ontario request that the government of Canada place a moratorium on the installation of cellular commercial communication transmission equipment on new or existing towers within 1,000 metres of residential homes until an improved separation distance is established by the federal government."

I agree with this, Speaker, will sign it and send it down with Georgia.

1330

PROTECTION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas supported-living residents in southwestern and eastern Ontario were subjected to picketing outside their homes during labour strikes in 2007 and 2009; and

"Whereas residents and neighbours had to endure megaphones, picket lines, portable bathrooms and shining lights at all hours of the day and night on their" residential "streets; and

"Whereas individuals with intellectual disabilities and the organizations who support them fought for years to break down barriers and live in inclusive communities; and

"Whereas Bill 23 passed first reading in the Ontario Legislature on December 6, 2011;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the members of the Legislative Assembly vote in support of Sylvia Jones's Bill 23—the Protecting Vulnerable People Against Picketing Act."

I obviously support this petition, affix my name to it and give it to page Noah to take to the table.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Joe Dickson: An addition to the HARP petition:
"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is in serious need of modernization;

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is not in harmony with all the following acts, regulations, guidelines and codes: the Occupational Health and Safety Act of Ontario, the radiation protection regulations of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, the safety codes of Health Canada and the radiation protection guidelines of the International Commission on Radiological Protection;

"Whereas dental hygienists need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by Reza Moridi, the member from Richmond Hill, that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations, make recommendations on how to modernize this act, and bring it to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, and I will pass it to Carley. I have already signed it and I'm pleased to present it.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario dealing with the scandal at Ornge.

"Whereas the report from Ontario's Auditor General on the province's air ambulance service, Ornge"—spelled without the "A"; the "A" stands for "accountability"—"found a web of questionable financial deals where tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars have been wasted and public safety compromised; and

"Whereas Ornge officials created a 'mini-conglomerate' of private entities that enriched former senior officers and left taxpayers on the hook for" over "\$300 million in debt; and

"Whereas government funding for Ornge climbed 20% to \$700 million, while the number of patients it airlifted actually declined; and

"Whereas a subsidiary of Ornge bought the head office building in Mississauga for just over \$15 million and then leased it back to Ornge at a rate 40% higher than fair market rent; and

"Whereas the Liberal Minister of Health completely failed in her duty to provide proper oversight of Ornge; and

"Whereas the latest scandal follows the eHealth boondoggle where over \$2 billion in health dollars were wasted;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government of Ontario immediately appoint a special all-party select committee to investigate the scandals surrounding Ornge."

I'm pleased to sign this petition as I'm in complete agreement with it, and I pass it to our page Gillian.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This petition reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas currently the law takes the onus off of owners that raise violent dogs by making it appear that violence is a matter of" dog "genetics; and

"Whereas the Dog Owners' Liability Act does not clearly define a pit bull, nor is it enforced equally across the province, as pit bulls are not an acknowledged breed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly passes Bill 16, Public Safety Related to Dogs Statute Law Amendment Act, 2011, into law."

I couldn't agree more. Yet another family pet has been taken into incarceration. Over 1,000 dogs euthanized already for nothing they did, except for the way they looked.

So I'm going to sign this, and I'm going to give it to Talin to deliver to the desk.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

ONTARIO SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR L'ASSOCIATION DES INGÉNIEURS DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Kwinter moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 15, An Act respecting the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers / Projet de loi 15, Loi concernant l'Association des ingénieurs de l'Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to acknowledge guests representing OSPE who are in the House today: Edwina McGroddy, Danny Young, Nadine Miller, Paul Acchione and Valerie Davidson.

Like other major professions in Ontario, the practice of professional engineering in this province is licensed and strictly regulated. Since 1922, licensing practices and

regulatory standards for the engineering profession have been governed by Professional Engineers Ontario, the PEO, as directed by the Professional Engineers Act, in order to protect public safety and well-being.

Before 2000, Ontario's professional engineers did not have a body dedicated solely to advocating for the interests of engineers, leaving PEO to handle this function in addition to licensing and regulation. By the 1990s, many professional engineers had long seen an inherent conflict of interest, with only one body seeking to protect the interests of the public and the interests of engineers simultaneously. Engineers felt that, like doctors, lawyers and other professionals, engineers ought to have a separate body dedicated solely to advocating for their interests.

Many professions also have a member interest body, which, as the name suggests, is dedicated to looking after the welfare and concerns of its members. This type of organization is not involved in setting standards of practice or qualifications, but rather acts to promote the interests of its members in the eyes of the public, the government and the profession itself.

In the medical field, for example, the College of Physicians and Surgeons protects the public interest, granting licences and carrying out disciplinary action where needed. The interests of doctors are looked after by the Ontario Medical Association, which lobbies government and speaks to the public on behalf of the profession. Within the legal profession, the Law Society of Upper Canada sets standards for the practice of law and suspends lawyers for unethical practice, and the Ontario Bar Association speaks out on behalf of the profession and also provides member services like workshops and training for lawyers. Both the OMA and the OBA are long-standing organizations, and the public is aware of the distinct role of each.

In 2000, engineers created this body, the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, or OSPE. OSPE is the advocacy and member services organization representing the interests of engineers across Ontario. Since it was created, OSPE has worked to advance the professional and economic interests of engineers by advocating with governments, industry and the public. PEO has always been, and continues to be, the regulatory and licensing body for the engineering profession.

During the debate on Bill 148 in 2011, Norm Sterling, the long-serving former MPP for Carleton-Mississippi Mills, who is both a lawyer and an engineer, had this to say:

"I want to indicate to my good friend Mr. Kwinter my support for his legislation today...."

"I was very, very happy when, prior to 2000, the engineering profession started to look at advocacy, because I felt that the regulating body, the Professional Engineers of Ontario as they were then and are now, were not adequately representing to the public the wonderful contributions our engineers make to our province...."

"I can't be prouder to be an engineer, and I urge everybody to support Mr. Kwinter and his bill."

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Besides advocacy, OSPE also provides important member services. OSPE publishes research and shares information pertinent to the profession, including fee schedules, salary benchmarking and policy recommendations on a range of subjects from infrastructure to energy. OSPE provides job listings and career planning tools for engineering graduates, professional engineers and engineers who are newcomers to Canada.

OSPE also provides Ontario's engineering community with valuable opportunities for ongoing professional development, which includes technical learning, management workshops and specific courses designed to help engineering graduates pursue the path of licensure and professional practice.

The Ontario Society of Professional Engineers is a unifying organization that acts as a powerful voice for engineers. It is a body that builds community and raises awareness among all Ontarians of the vital contributions that engineers make.

PEO has always been and continues to be the regulatory and licensing body for the engineering profession. Bill 15 formalizes in legislation the role of OSPE as the advocacy and member services body for engineers in Ontario.

The purpose of the bill is to solidify with a legislative framework the work that OSPE has already undertaken for more than a decade. Bill 15 is also aimed at providing much-needed clarity about the separate and distinct roles of OSPE and PEO. This is a distinction that needs to be made. In existence for just over a decade, OSPE is a relatively new organization, and while OSPE has made significant progress on behalf of the profession, it is still a constant struggle for OSPE to clarify its identity and how it is distinct from PEO.

The legislative framework provided by Bill 15 will strengthen OSPE, thereby strengthening the engineering profession and providing greater clarity for all of the stakeholders.

Many professions have a member-interest body, which, as the name suggests, is dedicated to looking after the welfare and concern of its members. This type of organization is not involved in setting standards of practice or qualification, but rather acts to promote the interests of its members in the eyes of the public, the government and the profession itself.

The regulator, PEO, can only advocate within the framework of self-regulation. A separate and distinct body, with the freedom to dedicate itself to the full scope of advocacy and empowered by legislation, will ensure that the voice of professional engineers can be heard on a full spectrum of issues.

In recent weeks, many of you have heard rather vehement opposition to Bill 15 from the regulator, PEO. Allow me to provide some history regarding Bill 15.

Bill 15 was originally introduced by me as a private member's bill, Bill 148, on December 8, 2010. Bill 148 passed second reading on March 3, 2011, with all-party support and absolutely no objection from PEO. The only

reason Bill 148 did not proceed to third reading was because of the provincial election in 2011. I felt strongly enough about the bill to reintroduce Bill 15 in November 2011.

Bill 15 is verbatim—there isn't a word changed in it—the same as Bill 148. On March 3, 2011, there wasn't any opposition to Bill 148, nor was there a campaign by PEO to block it. PEO has now released a strong position statement against Bill 15 and has undertaken concerted efforts via lobbyists and people who are sitting in the audience right now to block its passage. PEO now asserts that language used in the bill could contravene the Professional Engineers Act and create confusion due to the use of the term “professional engineer.” For these reasons, PEO has pressed OSPE to withdraw Bill 15.

Rather than withdraw the bill, OSPE has always indicated its willingness to mutually arrive at acceptable terminology to alleviate PEO's concerns. I've personally discussed this matter with OSPE on several occasions and I'm confident that OSPE will work with PEO on this once the bill is open for debate and it passes to second reading.

PEO also now argues that OSPE simply doesn't need this piece of legislation. At the same time, PEO has not easily relinquished its decades-old tradition of taking responsibility for both self-government and member interests. For example, PEO has a formal program that engages its members in advocacy. PEO has a department dedicated to engineering and public policy. PEO holds events that celebrate engineering and recognize engineering achievement. These programs are not focused strictly on licensing and regulation, and this is why OSPE believes it does need Bill 15.

In my opinion, Bill 15 makes sense. It is a non-threatening bill that is merely designed to formalize the distinction between PEO and OSPE. It is not anything new. It will serve to clarify and fully distinguish the respective roles of each body, thereby preventing overlays that compromise between the two and create confusion.

I know many of my colleagues and friends across the chamber agree. At OSPE's Queen's Park reception on March 6, representatives from each party spoke in favour of Bill 15. We heard very supportive comments from Christine Elliott, Progressive Conservative MPP for Whitby—Oshawa and deputy leader of the official opposition. We also heard impassioned words of support from Jagmeet Singh, NDP MPP for Bramalea—Gore—Malton. Many other MPPs have since expressed support for the bill.

After today's vote, PEO will continue to regulate and protect the public interest and OSPE will continue to do what it has been doing since 2000, which is to promote and advocate on behalf of the engineers. This bill, essentially, elevates an internal agreement in principle between the two organizations into statute in the province of Ontario. By doing this, we help the public in Ontario to recognize the profession in an official way and we allow this particular organization to receive the respect it deserves in our community. Furthermore, we help to

distinguish the relationship between the two organizations, providing clarity for government, engineers and society at large.

By passing Bill 15 into law, the Ontario government has an opportunity to provide clarity to Ontario engineers and the public in supporting delineation between advocacy and regulation for the engineering profession in Ontario. PEO speaks for the public; OSPE speaks for engineers. This legislation is necessary to help policy-makers and others to understand what is happening. I urge all members to support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I rise today to speak to this private members' bill, Bill 15, An Act respecting the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers. This bill proposes to enshrine in legislation the existence of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers. Since 1922, the licensing practice and regulatory standards for the engineering profession have been governed by Professional Engineers Ontario.

The Professional Engineers Act protects public safety by mandating Professional Engineers Ontario to license and regulate the industry. By the 1990s, many professional engineers had long seen an inherent conflict of interest, with only one body seeking to protect the interests of the public as well as the interests of engineers at the same time. Professional Engineers Ontario decided that their authority and activities should be restricted to the licensing and regulation of engineers, with the objectives of establishing and monitoring high standards for the profession. In this way, Professional Engineers Ontario protects the public interest.

Engineers felt that, like other professionals, they should have a separate organization dedicated solely to advocating for the interest of their profession. So in 2000, engineers created the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers. This society was created to look after the interests of engineers in Ontario, to be their advocacy arm. This was a good step. As one can appreciate, a regulatory body such as Professional Engineers Ontario shouldn't be advocating on behalf of its members. It would be like asking building inspectors to promote the interests of developers.

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One can also appreciate the other side of the coin. An advocacy body such as the Society of Professional Engineers shouldn't be regulating or licensing their industry. It would be like putting Greenpeace in charge of regulating the protection of our environment or putting PETA in charge of making laws against animal cruelty.

So these two organizations, Professional Engineers Ontario and the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, now exist in concert with each other. Both depend on the other in their separate but complementary roles. I feel this is the way it is supposed to be, the regulatory arm separate from the advocacy arm. All parties are accepting and supportive of the status quo.

As I've mentioned, other professionals like lawyers or doctors do have arm's-length organizations that advocate

on their behalf, but these advocacy groups don't have provincial legislation defining their existence. I do not see the need to create an act to legislatively legitimize the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers as an advocacy group. The society is operating very well as it is.

The interests of Ontarians are well served by the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers. This is an unneeded bill which I will be voting against. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to speak to this bill from a couple of points that need to be made.

Obviously, I've been contacted by professional engineers in the riding of Timmins-James Bay who do have concerns with this bill insofar as they think of it as, I guess—the simple way of putting it—a bit of an intrusion on to their responsibilities as a regulator.

Now, I know that the Society of Professional Engineers is saying no, that's not the case, that what they're trying to do with this bill is to clarify the roles of the two, one as the advocacy and the other being the regulatory, and making sure that there isn't a crossover or an illusion of making it look as if the society has responsibility for regulatory matters that otherwise is not the case. There is a bit of a controversy, I guess is the way you can put it, in this particular bill.

However, I think the way you fix that is by sending it to committee. In the end, I have some sympathy for what the professional engineers are saying, because they fought long and they fought hard to get what they've got. They are professionals, and it is to the public's interest and to the consumer's interest to make sure that the regulatory authorities of the professional societies of engineers are respected, because it is the measure by which they are able to police themselves when it comes to what practitioners are doing in their particular practice. If you didn't have that clear authority, what would you do if an engineer was to do something wrong? Clearly, this is a self-regulated body, and we need to make sure that we maintain the authority for them to be able to do what's right when it comes to what their profession is there to do.

On the other hand, what the society is about is essentially dealing with trying to educate people on what is going on, why you should be using professional engineers etc., and what they're trying to do by this act is what has happened in other professions where, on the one hand, you have the regulatory side that's recognized by the act, and the advocacy side is recognized as a separate organization. I think there's some logic to all of that.

I just want to say upfront that I want to register some objection on behalf of the professional engineers, because I think they do have a point, but I don't think it's a point that should prevent us from having this debate and allowing this bill to go to committee to be able to deal with things.

I just want to touch on a couple of things, and I just want to go through the act as an explanation.

The first problem that the professional engineers have is in section 1 under "Definition." They are saying

there's some ambiguity here, and you can argue this both ways, to be blunt. I can argue both sides of the argument at the same time to show that I'm an equal-opportunity kind of debater.

The argument on the part of the professional engineers is that it lends itself to making people think that somehow or other the Society of Professional Engineers has some kind of authority over the practice and the regulation of what an engineer has to do, because what it does in the definition is define both: "licensed professional engineer" means an individual who holds a licence to engage in the practice of professional engineering under the Professional Engineers Act"; and "Society" means the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers." That would kind of make it clear in my mind that they are two different things.

But then it goes on to say—and this is where a bit of the debate needs to be clarified as far as this particular definition, where it says, "No effect on rights of professional engineers." I think what you're trying to do in this act is to clarify that in fact, the society doesn't have any authority over the regulator, because it goes on to say, "This act does not affect the rights, obligations, qualifications or requirements related to the practice of engineering in Ontario, including the qualifications required to be a licensed professional engineer."

I would assume, and I'd like to hear back from the drafter of the bill, that what you're trying to get at here is to say, "Let's make it clear"—that's what you're trying to say—but there are those who say that that's not clear enough. I think you've heard the argument, and I don't think holding up this bill and not voting for it is a way to fix it. I think the way you fix it is to let it go to committee, and depending what comes out of committee, if it ever comes back for third reading, then we have a final decision to make: Should we vote in favour or against, based on what was amended?

Then we get into section 4, which is the objectives of the bill. Under section 4, which is quite lengthy, actually—it goes all the way up to section (i). It says:

"The objects of the society are,

"(a) to represent the interests of licensed professional engineers in Ontario, including speaking on their behalf..."

I think that's one of the places that the engineers have a little bit of a problem, because, yes, the Society of Professional Engineers is there to be essentially the people that do the advocacy, and I take it that that's what is being said in that section. But again, the way it was explained to me by the professional engineers—they want that be clearer, that this should not be interpreted as meaning to the general public that in fact they're the authority of the professional engineers. They're only the advocacy. So they're saying that they want a bit of clarity in that.

I think it's a fair point, and I think we need to hear from people who are in the profession, who do this from day to day. We need to hear from both the society and the licensed professional engineers, to hear what they have to say as far as the logical arguments, and if amendments

are needed, I think clause-by-clause is where we can deal with that when it gets to committee, should it pass the House.

Then it goes on:

“(b) to encourage the use of professional engineering services in Ontario”—full stop. I don’t think anybody disagrees with that, neither the society nor the professional engineers.

“(c) to promote and encourage, through its members, participation in the engineering profession”—I don’t think there’s much of an argument there. I think we understand what that’s all about.

“(d) to strive to make the implications of registration with the society more meaningful in Ontario”—I think that is, again, a section where a few questions have been raised. I know the members’ heard the argument, so I’m it not going to go through them here because I don’t have enough time, but I think they want a little bit of clarity on that particular one.

“(e) to assist licensed professional engineers to achieve and maintain the highest possible standards in the practice of professional engineering”—I understand what that means. I’m pretty sure that it means to say what it says, but again, they want a little bit of clarity there, that it shouldn’t infer that they’re sort of in charge of engineers, because, really, that’s the regulator’s role as far as that.

“(f) to provide risk management assistance to its members for the benefit of the member’s practice and for public protection”—I think that’s pretty clear.

“(g) to provide affinity and other related services to its members, including sponsoring and making recommendations regarding professional indemnity and other insurances and services that address the business and private needs of its members”—again, I think it’s pretty clear what you’re trying to get there as the author of the bill. But as explained to me, a few questions need to be asked around that section in committee, and I think you’re going to probably hear a little bit coming from the professional engineers on that one. I kind of get what you’re trying to get at, but I guess what I’m saying is that some see this as a bit of a crossover to what the responsibilities of the engineers actually are. But I think that could be clarified.

“(h) to sponsor programs, awards and services that promote excellence in the study and application of professional engineering in Ontario and elsewhere”—pretty straightforward.

And lastly, “(i) to recognize and honour significant achievements made by Ontario’s licensed professional engineers”—who’s going to argue with that? That’s motherhood and apple pie.

Those are sort of the objections that I’ve heard as brought to me both in Timmins and Kapuskasing by professional engineers we met with or talked to on the phone or who sent me emails. I actually got a fair amount of correspondence on this. I thought it was rather interesting.

I don’t want to be remiss, because there are people, as you know, who are professional engineers all across this

province, but one is near and dear to my heart: the brother of Cheri DiNovo, who’s a professional engineer, Paul DiNovo. I know he’s vastly interested in this particular bill and wants to do everything he can in order to promote the use of professional engineers in the province of Ontario. I figure—

1400

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: He’s retired.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: He retired? Oh my God, I didn’t know that part. Did he get a pension? That’s what I need to find out. Anyway, that’s a whole other story.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Do we get a pension if we pass this bill?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Listen, maybe. Who knows, right?

The point is, professional engineers have come a long way over the last 30 years, to where they’re now a self-regulated body. I think people are more and more proud of that, because what it has done is really help to make sure there’s a standard applied to the work; that those people who hire them, as far as getting their services, and the contractors and firms that have them, know there’s a certain standard that’s met.

I think that what you’re seeing as far as blowback is that people are proud of what they’re doing, and they’re saying to themselves, “Listen, we don’t want in any way to make it look as if we’re going to weaken down what professional engineers are all about. We need to make sure we maintain that vision and that people see professional engineers as a profession that is truly transparent, as far as what they’re required to do and what their qualifications are, and if any issues need to be dealt with, what authority the regulatory bodies have over any misconduct or anything that might have been done.”

I look forward to this particular debate in committee. I think that would be the time to address the rest of them.

I just end on this one final point. Over the years, we get lobbied by a lot of people in this place. But I’ve got to tell you, the engineers and the CAs and CGAs are probably among—would you say—the most vociferous, and I mean that in a nice way. They understand that it’s important to make contact with their local member of provincial Parliament and bring their issues to us so that we become a little bit more knowledgeable. Some of the other professions out there just take it for granted. How often do you hear from the Ontario Medical Association membership in your riding? I think I meet with them maybe once every couple of years.

My point is, the Ontario Professional Engineers are always inviting us to their annual meetings. They’re meeting with us in our offices. The CAs and the CGAs do the same kind of thing, and I would just encourage other professions to do the same. Sit down with your local member of provincial Parliament; tell them what your association is up to, what’s going on; invite them out to annual meetings and whatever, so that we, as legislators, can be more in tune with what the issues are and what’s required of us as legislators to assist them in their work.

I just want to applaud both the society and the professional engineers for doing a really good job of

getting out and doing that, because I think it allows us to have a much more civil debate here in the Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Reza Moridi: As a scientist and engineer, and a member of this House, I am particularly interested in issues related to the engineering profession.

I spoke to this bill last year, in the last Parliament, when it was debated as Bill 148. Bill 15 is, word by word, the exact same bill. As was the case last year, I'm again very pleased to speak to Bill 15, An Act respecting the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, and to speak in support of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers.

I believe that securing the position of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers through legislation will benefit the people of Ontario, ensuring that both the public and policy-makers know exactly who speaks on behalf of engineers, whose input has such a paramount and strong impact on Ontario's economy and well-being.

The value of engineers in society is no secret. Engineers are leaders in research and innovation in all industry sectors in Ontario. They are integral to the quality of life we in Ontario enjoy. We boast vibrant, world-class cities. We benefit from exceptional health care. We enjoy clean, safe drinking water and state-of-the-art transportation systems. We are creating thousands of jobs and helping to put Canada on the global map through our innovations in biotechnology, information technology, green energy and other knowledge-based sectors. None of this would be possible without the work of engineers. Indeed, our economic strength as a province is directly related to the work that engineers do every day.

Every single day we encounter countless products of engineering, from the food we eat to the vehicles we drive, from the electricity we use to the myriad devices we rely on to keep us connected. Engineers make our society run safely and smoothly.

The fact that the public does not know how important engineers are has been a challenge for this profession for some time, and it is one of the main reasons why the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers was created. Engineers know how important their work is, but they must work hard to share that knowledge with the rest of Ontarians.

Besides promoting the professional and economic interests of engineers, part of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers' mandate is to highlight and advance engineering innovation. The Ontario Society of Professional Engineers is actively working with various government ministries and committees, such as the Building Advisory Council, to assist in streamlining effective building code regulations to make Ontario more innovative and efficient in the design and development of structures.

Through the Ministry of Energy, the Ontario Power Authority, the Independent Electricity System Operator and others, the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers

is providing vital input to help our province contain electricity costs, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ensure that Ontarians do not pay more for electricity produced here than our counterparts in neighbouring provinces and jurisdictions.

The Ontario Society of Professional Engineers also successfully lobbied to retain domestic jobs and intellectual property through the thoughtful restructuring of Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd.

The Ontario Society of Professional Engineers is supporting the professional interests of engineers by advocating for inclusion of professional engineers in regulations in instances where engineering is performed. For example, Ontario regulation 153/04 stipulates that only professional engineers or geoscientists may perform record of site condition on environmental assessments. Such demand-side legislation should be in place for all regulations that cover situations in which engineering is performed.

The public is aware that Professional Engineers Ontario, PEO, acts as the licensing and regulating body for professional engineers in Ontario and it is the go-to organization for complaints and disciplinary procedures and matters.

While it is true that there may be times when advocating for the professional interests of engineers and advocating for public safety converge, the separation of advocacy from regulation is a tenet of regulated professions that safeguards the interests of the profession.

Mr. Speaker, it's not a difficult decision for me to support Bill 15, and I hope my colleagues in this House will do the same.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I rise today on Bill 15, An Act representing the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers. I've been a licensed professional engineer for more than 30 years, a proud Queen's engineer and a former director of the eastern Ontario chapter.

Professional engineers have played a huge role in this country's development, from their design of roads and bridges and military support even before Confederation, to supporting our manufacturing, electrical, mining, chemical and aerospace industries, just to name a few.

The engineering profession is charged with the task of turning pure science into practical applications that we use every day and ensuring that the public interest and safety is looked after.

In the Professional Engineers Act, the term "professional engineer" is a protected title. This is to ensure that the public can be assured that those who call themselves professional engineers are fully qualified and licensed, and provide the adequate insurance behind them.

During many of my opportunities to address students in my former role as mayor of South Glengarry and now in my current role as MPP, I've always discussed the important and rewarding career that the engineering field provided and recommended that the students look into and consider it for themselves.

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As when I was in high school, I find that most students do not understand the profession and are not aware of the opportunities that it makes available to them. It is really a sad state of affairs, considering the huge shortage of engineers that is forecasted to face our industries in the near future. And we all know the importance of the role this profession plays in the future of Ontario and Canada.

All this is to say that this suggests that there is a real role for the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers to play in promoting and looking after the concerns of the industry.

But I cannot support this bill, as to enshrine the organization in legislation would only serve to confuse the public even more. This is not done, as we see in other professions, where the advocacy organizations work hand in hand with the licensed professionals without legislation. Members of the society do not have to be professional engineers, and in fact, approximately one third are not. One could easily see the public being confused and truly believing a member of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers to be licensed to fulfill the duties of a professional engineer when, clearly, they do not have to be.

Numerous times in my role as mayor, we would see developers come in with plans that were signed off on by somebody who had a title sometimes very close, and they'd be very upset when they were told we could not accept the plans, for a number of reasons. One is, we need to know that the person who signed the plans is actually qualified to do the work. As important, or more importantly, it is required in law that we have the insurance behind it and that the developer have the insurance behind it. If there's a mistake in the design, he has a place to go. He can take it up in the courts. Without that professional engineer, he does not have that.

Public safety must be paramount in our consideration of this bill. You can clearly see the opportunity for confusion. Mr. Speaker, while I support the need for an advocacy group for the benefit of professional engineers and the public, I cannot support the legislation. The Professional Engineers Act was put into legislation to protect the public, and adding new legislation only serves to confuse the public, and that would be wrong. I strongly encourage the members of the Legislature to vote against this bill.

The last time this bill came before the House, the Professional Engineers of Ontario stood aside and did nothing, and that was because they were told the bill would die, as it did. But that is no reason why we should pass this bill, just because we believe it may die again.

It is clear that the association of professional engineers does not need legislation to function, so why take action that serves only to confuse the public? The medical and legal professions do not have legislation, so why would we do something for this profession? We already have many people who take on these titles that are close and somewhat confusing to the public, and now we are only enshrining another confusing title into the books.

I speak against this and recommend that my colleagues in this Legislature do the same.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I appreciate the effort by my colleague from York Centre to present, for the second time, his bill that proposes to separate advocacy and regulation through the delineation of the Professional Engineers of Ontario, or PEO, and the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, or OSPE. As he pointed out, this is the second time it has come before the Legislature, the first time—an identical bill—being in December 2010.

Engineers, of course, are now only coming to the choice of having two separate and distinct bodies: PEO, to handle licensing and self-regulation in order to protect the public, as some of the other speakers have noted; and OSPE, to handle advocacy and member services, in the interests of engineers.

It's worth making mention that engineers do not have to make this decision but that this bill is going to offer professional engineers that choice. Ultimately, engineers, through their input, possibly at committee, will choose how they wish to proceed. As a Legislature, of course, we'll respect that choice.

Engineers have played a very proud role in the development of our province, our country and our communities, and in many of our families. We all have friends and relatives who are electrical, mechanical, civil or solid-state engineers. With a little nod to a lot of our farmer friends, I can truthfully say, "Like your iPad? Thank an engineer."

Engineers are recognized by their trademark iron ring, and engineers are, by and large, by nature, optimists. They build things. They change the world, in literal terms, and where we talk in figurative terms about bridge building, to an engineer that means iron over a span. Engineers, of course, put a man on the moon—most of those guys were in their 20s. Engineers put humanity's body of knowledge onto little pieces of silicon that we can and do access anywhere, any time. Engineers, of course, give rise to their own brand of tongue-in-cheek humour. For example, if you are not part of the solution, you must be part of the precipitate.

Lawyers, of course, are regulated by the Law Society of Upper Canada. Members' services for lawyers and advocacy on their behalf are handled by the Ontario Bar Association. The Ontario Bar Association was established in 1907. Similarly, physicians are regulated and licensed by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, but the interests of doctors are borne by the Ontario Medical Association, which has been in existence since 1880. Clearly, just to use these two examples, these organizations have been around for a long time. Practitioners are very clear about the distinction between regulator and advocate for their respective professions. Similarly, the public is clear about which body to turn to when they have a problem.

The Ontario Society of Professional Engineers suggests that Bill 15 would clearly delineate in the eyes of

the public, of consumers of engineering services, and of engineers in government, that PEO works in the interests of the public and OSPE works on behalf of its members. OSPE was established in 2000, and comparatively speaking it's a very young organization. There are more than 75,000 licensed engineers in Ontario. Not all of them are fully aware of the distinctions between OSPE and PEO. So the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers still faces an uphill curve in clearly establishing its identity.

The legislative framework provided by Bill 15 suggests that it provides greater clarity for all stakeholders, thereby strengthening the engineering profession as a whole in Ontario. Now, my colleague from Timmins-James Bay points out that the bill asks the Ontario Legislature to send it to committee for further input from the profession, from those who consume engineering services, from the public and from others with a stake in engineering. Bill 15 is intended to formalize in legislation the role of OSPE as the advocacy and members' services body for engineers in Ontario, and points out that these are activities that OSPE has already undertaken effectively for more than a decade.

One would then ask, so what's the next step? Well, the bill may not pass here, in which case there is no next step, or the bill may pass today and be referred to a committee, where it can gain some input from the stakeholders and then may or may not be called for third reading, which gives us another chance to decide whether or not this is or isn't a good idea. It offers the engineering profession, the public, stakeholders, and indeed the Legislature a chance to continue to examine the issue and to make what we hope will be a truly informed choice.

Speaker, I thank you very much for your time to discuss the bill, and I urge all of my colleagues to give it consideration and to make what is, in their minds, an informed choice.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to debate Bill 15, An Act respecting the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers. As the newly appointed critic of the Attorney General, I have had an opportunity to meet and speak with stakeholders who have an interest in Bill 15. I would like to thank them for accommodating me and providing me with their input prior to today's vote. I very much appreciated your advice.

What I found is that two organizations in Ontario have two very different views on whether Bill 15 should proceed: the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers on the one hand, and Professional Engineers Ontario on the other. I think it's worthwhile to take stock of where we are right now regarding these two engineering-related organizations, as well as the engineering profession in general.

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The OSPE is an organization that offers important advocacy and member services for engineers in Ontario. Their organization is voluntary, and it is made up of in-

dividuals who pay for the benefits of being a member. The OSPE's role is similar to other advocacy and membership services organizations such as the Ontario Bar Association.

PEO, on the other hand, is a licensing and regulating body for Ontario's engineers. Membership in PEO is mandatory for all engineers in the province. You must be a member of PEO in good standing to call yourself a professional engineer, an engineer or any similar title that could portray you as being qualified to practise professional engineering. In essence, the PEO fulfills the same role for engineers as the College of Physicians and Surgeons for doctors or the Law Society of Upper Canada for lawyers. Right now, there are approximately 73,000 licensed professional engineers in Ontario, all of whom, of course, are members of PEO.

The OSPE was formed around 2000 because PEO membership felt there was a conflict of interest in PEO being both the regulator and the advocacy body for Ontario engineers. While the OSPE has been operating as the advocacy body since then, PEO has been the professions regulator since the 1920s. Therefore, what we have had for the last 10 years is a separation of regulatory and advocacy responsibilities in the engineering profession, which brings me now to Bill 15, which we are debating here today.

This bill has been brought forward to bring clarity to the separation of responsibilities by laying out in legislation what the OSPE is and what it does. Legislating the OSPE's role does not have much precedence in the way of advocacy bodies having their mandates set out in legislation. What I mean is, there are currently many advocacy bodies in the province performing these mandates without the need for legislation.

I'd like to share some of the organizations, because I think they set a positive example of what is possible without the need for legislation: the Ontario Library Association, the Ontario Association of Social Workers, the Ontario Pharmacists' Association, the Paralegal Society of Ontario, the Registered Nurses' Association and the Ontario Bar Association, which I mentioned earlier. All of these organizations currently represent their members' interests without legislative authority from a separate piece of legislation to govern their education and advocacy role.

It is for these reasons that I think OSPE is doing an important job representing its members, and in principle, I agree with the separation of advocacy and regulatory responsibilities. So whether this legislation passes or not, we will need to ensure that the profession continues to work together to resolve their differences moving forward. Thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Point of order, Mr. Speaker: It's my distinct pleasure to welcome two visitors to the members' gallery this afternoon. These men represent Step by Step, the organ donation awareness charity that has conducted eight province-wide campaigns to date:

Constable Ojo Tewogbade is the chair, and Mr. Clairmont Humphrey is the vice-chair.

Constable Ojo has done exceptional work to involve the Toronto police in his worthy cause, while Mr. Clairmont Humphrey has actually donated part of his liver to save the life of an 18-month-old child.

Thank you, gentlemen, for the exceptional work you do to increase awareness of the need for organ donation in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you to the member, but that's not a point of order. But welcome to the Legislature.

The member for York West, a two-minute response.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Mr. Speaker, it's York Centre.

When I was first approached by OSPE, I thought this would be a very easy thing to do just by sending this particular bill to the committee on regulations and private bills. I was informed by legislative counsel that it can't happen because we're asking something that the act that provides for Professional Engineers Ontario—that it prohibits OSPE from advocating on behalf of the engineers. I mean, we had this whole argument saying why we need this, and this is why we need it. So we had to come forward with a separate bill.

Since 2000, they have been doing that in conjunction with each other. This just regulates it so that there is legislation that gives them that authority and allows them to be able to do what they have to do, and that is to promote the best interests of the profession.

It's an interesting comment: In the PEO information backgrounder on Bill 15, there's a statement that states, "PEO is unclear why the government would support legislation for any advocacy body, whose primary purpose is member self-interest and active lobbying of government and regulators." So they're in a direct conflict. They don't want anybody to have that authority, which is exactly what they want.

Notwithstanding that, Professional Engineers Ontario put out an information piece that shows that there is a separation. They show right here that the professional engineers are the regulator in the interest of the public and OSPE is the advocate in the interest of its members. I think, at the very least, this thing should go to committee so that they can talk about it, they can discuss it at length and decide, as everyone has said—and it was interesting for me to listen to them. Everybody says, "I think it's great. I think it's great that they should be there as advocates; we just don't want them enshrined them in law." What are they afraid of? I can assure you also that people won't go up to you and say, "Are you a member of OSPE or are you a member of Professional Engineers Ontario?" That is not going to happen. The fact that there are over 7,000 members of OSPE tells you that there's a significant number of people in the profession who think that they should have the right to be able to advocate on behalf of their profession.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. We'll vote on this bill at the end of regular business.

LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT OF REGULATIONS ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LA SURVEILLANCE LÉGISLATIVE DES RÈGLEMENTS

Mr. Nicholls moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 62, An Act to provide for the legislative oversight of regulations / Projet de loi 62, Loi visant à prévoir la surveillance législative des règlements.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standard order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's a pleasure for me to rise today for the second reading of my first piece of private members' legislation, Bill 62, the Legislative Oversight of Regulations Act, 2012. It's a very humbling moment as well. I want to thank my constituents in the riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex for their confidence in me, which is the reason why I'm able to be here today. I represent our home with pride.

When I was first elected to the Legislature as an MPP, I had a particular goal in mind: to do my part in making Ontario the greatest economic power in the nation once again. During the campaign, I was asked over and over by families what I would do as an MPP to create jobs in the province, to get them back on their feet and back to work.

When the global recession hit and it got much harder to operate a business in Ontario, my riding was hit particularly hard. Our workers tried their best to carry on, much as they always had, with patience and with fortitude. But now the job has fallen to us to do what we can to help our home-grown businesses to not just survive, but to thrive. It's to that end that I'm pleased to introduce Bill 62, the Legislative Oversight of Regulations Act. I believe this is an important step that each party will agree with, one that will bring more accountability to the regulatory oversight within Ontario and will demonstrate to business owners across the province that we're here, all of us, to make job creation easier and not harder.

It's no longer a secret that the red tape burden in Ontario has spun wildly out of control. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has perhaps been the most vocal champion of wrangling the red tape challenge for our province before the costs of that burden further weigh down our ability to recover our economy from the brink of disaster.

What does it cost us? According to the CFIB, it could be as high as \$11 billion a year, the sum total of nearly 400,000 regulations in our province alone. Now, if you ask any business owner, these are not numbers that inspire confidence. These are not numbers that attract rampant investment in the industries at which Ontario used to excel, such as manufacturing.

In fact, the CFIB did exactly that earlier this year. They asked business owners to express what confidence they had in our ability, the ability of the members of this

Legislature, to get Ontario's economic recovery right. Their replies were not heartening: 78% of respondents wanted quick action, but most of them said that they were not seeing it from Queen's Park. Now, in speaking with my constituents, I've heard much of the same: They're frustrated; they fear for the future of their businesses amidst a \$16-billion deficit, growing energy rates and a laundry list of regulations that has grown out of control.

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I'd like to tell you a story, if I may, Speaker. A few months ago, I was speaking with one of my constituents, a small business owner in the wonderful little town of Wheatley, which is a community of less than 2,000 people. This gentleman operates a fish store that employs 27 people. One day, his plant was undergoing a provincial inspection. The business owner was told that a tray in his processing room was going to have to be replaced. The reason? The tray was used to collect fish guts, which would never be used for any kind of human consumption, and it was made of aluminum, not stainless steel. A replacement, he told me, would cost his business \$1,200. He said that he would potentially be subject to fines if the conditions were not met. "This is regulation run amok," he said to me, putting it in better words than I could ever. "We're not High Liner; we're a small business." Indeed, it's often small businesses that are hit the hardest. Regulations that are designed for much larger companies don't often consider the effect on a company that employs eight instead of 80.

We spoke with the owner of a family-owned-and-operated building centre in London earlier today. The proprietor told us of the hours that he had to spend renewing a commercial vehicle operator's registry for each and every one of the vehicles in his fleet. The problem is that he was asked to supply information to the ministry that the ministry already had access to. "Why," he said, "am I spending \$50 and risking having my vehicles go without licence just to provide information that's already in the system?" It's a good question.

Why does the owner of a cottage rental service in Haliburton have to comply with two separate and distinct regulatory bodies, one for real estate and one for travel agents? Perhaps it makes sense on paper—she's providing both a travel service and renting out property—but she is threatened with losing her insurance because by operating under one agency, she is illegally not operating under another.

It's time to take heed. It's time to stand up for our business owners, not let them down, and that's why I believe this bill is an important step forward.

Allow me to tell the Legislature and the rest of Ontario what this bill does. We have a problem in Ontario: Businesses are being held back by more red tape and overregulation at every turn. Government has made it harder, not easier, for job creators to expand into the areas that need them most. How does this bill address those issues? It recognizes the need for a more comprehensive system of regulation management than we currently have. What this bill will accomplish from the

outset is the creation of a registry of regulations, a document in three volumes that I'd like to call the sunbeam list.

If that sounds familiar, well, it should. Much like the current sunshine list, the sunbeam list will keep the government system of regulations open and accountable to the people of Ontario. It's a document designed to measure and track the progress that must be made if we are to help home-grown businesses not just thrive, but expand.

Volume 1 will list each one of the hundreds of thousands of government regulations as line items. The items will be clear, concise, and easier to track and research. Volume 2 will then take each of those regulations and describe them in full, so that business owners can quickly find out exactly what they're dealing with when faced with a regulatory challenge. Lastly, volume 3 is my personal favourite. As both sides of this Legislature move forward towards real red tape reductions and work together on clearing the way for powerful job growth, volume 3 of the sunbeam list will track each of the outdated regulations that have been removed. With any luck, one volume will grow smaller as another grows larger. As the brush from the red tape forest is cleared, we will have proof positive that Ontario is going to be a place once again where businesses are welcome, where both large and small businesses don't have to shut their doors because they cannot manage the regulatory barriers that are in fact in their way.

But we won't stop there. That is the transparency part of the bill. We must strive as well to stay accountable to job creators that power our great province.

As my colleague from Oxford discovered in March 2011, it is possible for red tape reduction efforts to go off the rails, especially within larger government bureaucracies. Secret internal documents from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs revealed that certain red tape reduction efforts were being fast-tracked not through hard work but by sleight of hand, hiding one regulation inside another or not counting others. We owe it to business owners to ensure that when we say we are eliminating needless regulations, we're actually doing so. For that reason, Speaker, this bill will give the Auditor General the power to conduct a yearly audit of the third volume of the registry, ensuring that regulations the government claims to remove are actually gone for good.

Next, new regulations, despite their nobility of purpose, all too often come with a cost to businesses that they affect, as the CFIB has demonstrated. That is why this bill will ensure that every new regulation proposed by the government be subject to a cost-benefit analysis upon proposal. That way, there will be no confusion, no hidden expenses passed along to business operators unexpectedly. This, I believe, will be a substantial step forward in restoring the public's faith in their elected officials—that's all of us, Speaker—to recognize the challenges that we all face. And it will make planning for the next fiscal year easier, ensuring some stability in uncertain economic times.

I mentioned at the beginning of my speech that, through effective collaboration of all parties, we can individually demonstrate to the families in our ridings that we are committed to putting an economic structure in place in Ontario that creates jobs. We can do that by not spending more than we take in, by making solid commitments that achieve measurable goals, and by taking a fresh approach to job creation that puts accountability to business owners first.

I want to stress that none of us works alone in these goals. To the general public, it may sometimes seem that way, though. We can and must work together. That's why I'm proud to be part of a caucus that has taken numerous steps to address the serious issue of over-regulation in Ontario over the last year.

In conclusion, I just want to mention this: There is progress being made. We have heard from other of our colleagues throughout our caucus and others as well that they're attempting to eliminate and reduce the red tape. So, again, there is progress being made, to the credit of everyone here on all sides of the House. The progress has been reasonable. Each of us wants to pave the way for job creation while responsibly protecting the regulations we do need, those that safeguard our health, our food and our families. But I believe we can do more.

There remains a multi-billion dollar burden. There remain hundreds of thousands of regulations that must be addressed. We must not lose our momentum, confirming the worst fears of business owners across the province that when push comes to shove, their elected members will disappear. That's not only their fear; it's mine as well.

I hope I can count on the support of the Legislature this afternoon for businesses and families not just in my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex, but for those constituents in ridings such as Mississauga, Peterborough, and right up to Kenora-Rainy River.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to hearing from my other colleagues in the House later on this afternoon and to a vote, positive, on Bill 62. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Timmons-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I've got to say that the member's going to both like and not like what I have to say in regard to this particular bill.

I want to speak on behalf of the New Democratic caucus, and I specifically want to speak to this as a member who's been here for some 20-plus years and as House leader for the New Democratic Party.

Listen, there's a real problem in this Legislature, and that is that over the years we've transferred the responsibility for drafting legislation from this Legislature to the cabinet. Let me explain how that happened.

When I got here some 20-odd years ago, very little was left in legislation to the way of regulation. A bill would be drafted. Once the bill was drafted, it would pass second reading; it would go into committee; there would be hearings, there would be discussion, there would be amendment, and very little was left to regulation. In fact,

almost 100% of the bills back then essentially said, "The minister shall," and this is what the 'shall's' are all about and this is the way it's going to work," so that legislators and, more importantly, the public understood what the drafter of the bill, being the government, wanted. The bill went through the process and eventually passed at third reading with the full knowledge of what the bill would do.

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Over the years, what we've now done is we've drafted bills so that in virtually every section of the bill, the detail is left to regulation, which essentially says that once the bill has left this House after third reading, this Legislature has no more say about what that bill is going to do.

Let me just give you one example. There was a bill passed in this House some time ago in regard to municipalities having to have a referendum when it comes to the creation of casinos. The original intent of that bill was to give the idea that a municipality had to have a referendum in the case of a casino. That was the intent of the bill when it left this House. By leaving that particular section open to regulation—because eventually the regulation was enacted, and the regulation was 347/00—it essentially made sure that any municipality that wanted a casino had to have a referendum. Well, guess what? The government has now introduced an amendment to this regulation and has scrapped it. Essentially, what they've done is the complete opposite: Now you no longer have to have a referendum in order to have a casino in your community. The only thing that you have to do, as per the regulation, is prepare a business case, set out the costs, demonstrate the viability and other matters that are considered to be appropriate, and then you have to have a consultation with the public, and the public has to write you in written form, for them to be able to say what they think about it. Then it's entirely up to the municipality, without a referendum, to allow the casino to be created in your community. That was not the intent of what this Legislature said when that bill was drafted. The intent of the bill was to give municipalities and, more importantly, the citizens of those municipalities or reserves the ability to have a say by direct referendum: "Should a casino be created in my community or on my reserve?" That was the intent of the bill when it left this House. But because we now delegate our authority to regulation, the cabinet has decided to do completely the opposite of what this House pronounced itself on.

So the issue, to me, is that we should take a bill such as is being suggested now and not deal with what the member wants—because what he wants is more red tape, essentially, and I'll get to that a little bit later. We should be reasserting our authority, as members of this Legislature, that whatever leaves this House leaves with the full view and the full knowledge of what is intended by the legislation, and to leave to regulation very little in regard to what the cabinet can do later.

Let me give you another example. A Parliament could decide, let's say today, to have a bill to say that the walls

of this assembly are white. That is the intent of what the bill would say. We leave it all up to regulation, a cabinet is then sworn in some elections later, maybe a totally different government, and they decide, "We can destroy the wall." Nothing would prevent them from doing that. Would that have been the intent of the original bill? The intent of the original bill would have been to make the wall white. But a future cabinet, and not even in the full scrutiny of the public, can decide to destroy the wall.

My point is, the fact that this Legislature has allowed governments to draft bills and has allowed, in some cases, private members to draft bills that delegate our authority to regulation is a bad, bad thing. What we should be doing is ensuring that with bills drafted, there is little in the way of regulation, and where there is regulation, there needs to be an established process by which members know what the regulations are before it gets out of committee. How do we, as committee members of this Legislature, know what the bill is going to do if we don't know what the regulation is going to say? What we always have are these debates in committee about, "Well, the bill intends to make sure that the sky is blue," and all the members say, "Okay, I understand the intent. The sky is supposed to be blue." Then the regulations are drafted by bureaucrats and others and come to cabinet for approval, and that particular bill ends up turning the sky purple. Was that the intent of the legislation? No.

The member's bill that he brings forward today says, "I want to make sure that only those regulations that deal with business, that may add a cost, have to be reviewed"—in a way that is highly bureaucratic, I would say. You would add cost to the government greatly if the only intent of what you're trying to do is to make sure that we understand the full economic impact of a regulation. I think that is not the issue. I think that's a bogus issue. The issue is, this House should not let a bill out of its sight unless it knows what the hell the regulation is. That's what we should be doing.

Now, I think the bill should go to committee. I disagree wholeheartedly with what you're doing. I think saying that the Ministry of Finance has to give me a full accounting of how much it's going to cost, and then once that's done the public auditor has got to do the same, we're going to be spending millions of dollars trying to deal with regulations that quite frankly should have never been drafted in the first place, because it is the right of this assembly and our responsibility to decide what legislation is going to be, and not the cabinet of Ontario.

So I say we need to take a look at this bill in committee so that we can actually get at the real issue. I will not support you in committee in what you're trying to do with the regulations. Neither will any New Democrat in regard to saying we need to review regulations only for the idea of reducing cost to business, because the issue is that we should be fully accounting what we're going to do in this Legislature by way of drafting bills in a way that they're clear, and, when regulation is necessary, that the regulations are made available prior to us voting at third reading; in other words, while it's in committee.

And here's the second part. If there is a change to regulation—let's say that there is a regulation that needs to be drafted, and there are times where you'll have to redraft the regulation because of some circumstance—there needs to be a mechanism once a change to a regulation is done after third reading that that regulation is not enacted unless it comes back to this Legislature. Otherwise, this is dictatorship by the back door. Essentially, what you end up with is that a government today could pass a bill saying, "I want the sky to be blue," and the government tomorrow could come back and say, "No, it's going to be purple," and that was not the intent of the assembly.

So the other issue we need to look at in committee is not the red tape thing. I think that's a silly idea. But the bigger issue—and I don't mean that in a patronizing way; it's just my view, sorry. I'm a bit worked up about this. We need to look at a process that says that once a regulation has been passed through the committee process and approved in legislation after third reading, that when a government decides to change a regulation, there needs to be a mechanism. Either those regulations are all referred to a committee for scrutiny and approval or they are referred back to the House, and there are different ways of doing it. I quite frankly don't trust cabinet to do it, and I've been in government and I know well what can happen with cabinets when it comes to decisions on regulation. Every government is just as bad when it comes to their history on this thing. The only thing I will say is that in the time that we were in government, 1990 to 1995, we left very little to regulation in the bills that we drafted. Since that time, in virtually every bill that goes through this House, most of the sections are left open to regulation. At the end of the day, it's the cabinet that decides what's going to be in the regulation, so that members are here making a decision on a bill, and the entire bill can have a completely different meaning by way of the regulation.

And once the regulation is done, we have nothing to say about it, other than to say, "I'd like the regulation to come back to regs and private bills." And let me read you the three-page section in the standing orders that says I can't do anything about it, because under the standing orders, once a regulation is made, we can go back and look at it, but we can't change the outcome of what the regulation is.

In this case, we have Mr. McNaughton, who introduced a bill saying there should be a referendum in municipalities. Well, guess what? The government, by way of regulation, has essentially gotten rid of the necessity to have one, and when you draft your bill—and I haven't looked at it in detail—if you leave it to regulation, you could end up having the same thing happen to your bill.

So I'm saying to the member, we're going to allow this bill to go to second reading, and do not—I say again, do not, N-O-T—think that New Democrats are supporting the idea of what the member is trying to do on the Red Tape Commission, because what he's trying to do is

essentially say the only time we should review a regulation is when it has to do with how it's going to affect business. Well, there are a whole bunch of other people. What about drinking water in this province? What about environmental regulation? What about how we deal with everything else when it comes to bills in this province, when it comes to regulation and the effect those regulations will have on Ontarians through the bills that are drafted in this House?

So we will allow the bill to go forward, but we want to make it extremely clear this is not an endorsement on the idea of what the member is trying to do by way of, I think, creating more red tape and costing more money to only review those things that affect business.

1450

My argument is we should do that with everything. We should have full knowledge of what a bill is when it leaves this place, and we should know what the regulations are and what they're going to do. Then, once regulations are changed for some reason after the initial passage of the bill, there needs to be a process of approval through one of our committees or through this House, because otherwise, by the back door the government of the day and governments in the future are going to be able to do pretty well what they want with legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to join this discussion of the proposal by the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex. I want to start off by saying, for viewers, that this is actually a good example of how a Legislature ought to work. There's a difference between what we're discussing here in terms of the legislation and the person who has proposed it. One of my mentors here, the member for Vaughan, once said to me, "It's okay to be tough on the bill, but you've got to be soft on the people."

So I do have to say a few things about the bill proposed by the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex. It's my opportunity, first of all, to publicly welcome him to the Ontario Legislature and to say congratulations on his election last year. I notice, in watching him, that he's very respectful of his role as part of the continuum of government in Ontario. He's moderate in his tone, and he tries to be constructive in his criticism. And criticism is his job, because he's a member of the opposition.

He offers, for example, a great standard in maintaining decorum, and he would follow some of his other proud colleagues such as my colleague from Newmarket-Aurora, also a member whom those of us here on the government side respect for his decorum and his respect for the government and what we do here. In fact, I would say that others in his caucus would do well to emulate his fine example.

But in the spirit of being soft on the member but hard on the legislation, let's talk about the legislation. Now, we know the member didn't draft this private member's bill. In fact, this bill or something like it is raised regularly by opposition members in every Parliament, in

every session, by every government. No party in government would propose to enact this, although that said, I have a lot of common ground with the comments made by my colleague from Timmins-James Bay, particularly when he says that when we propose a bill here and we discuss a bill here, when that bill leaves this Legislature its intent should be very clear. But the problem with the bill proposed by the member is that it doesn't get anyone, as he says, back on their feet. In fact, it only gets bureaucrats to sit on their rear to shuffle paper, to create databases and to generate endless miles of blue tape in creating cost-benefit analyses.

For example, the member's proposals would require a cost-benefit analysis for regulations when we already have the Ontario Regulatory Registry. He says we want bureaucrats either in the Ministry of Finance or the Auditor General's office to do analyses on proposed regulations when the already existing Regulatory Registry is a one-stop website where businesses can view and comment on regulatory proposals that impact them and learn about recently approved regulations.

All ministries are required to post regulatory proposals for a minimum of 45 days, and approved regulations affecting business on the Regulatory Registry, which is linked to the Environmental Registry. Experience to date indicates that compliance has been steadily improving since its introduction. In other words, it already works. Why replicate it?

As well, within the province there is a cap-and-trade provision. A cap and trade requires ministries, for example, to revoke two regulations for every new or amending regulation that's brought forward. Since it was introduced four years ago, three times as many regulations have been revoked, compared to new regulations passed.

Speaker, what I'm saying here is that however well-intended this member may have been, this familiar old package of bringing regulations back to the Legislature, which would require the member—to be entirely fair to him—to forgo the idea of rising for the summer in June, probably to get back into the practice of sitting until 9:30 or midnight when the Legislature is in session and to sit a great deal longer, and in so doing, to spend a lot less time with his constituents and a lot less time doing the job that the people who sent him here elected him to do and to spend a lot more time sifting through routine paperwork on the minutiae of government, which really don't belong in the Legislature once we pass the legislation—and here I'm going to agree with my colleague from Timmins-James Bay—with essentially its intent clear and encapsulated in well-drafted regulations. This would create red tape, not combat it.

There are a couple of pieces of regulation-saving initiatives that I think I'd like to mention that our government has enacted in the years we've been here. I would like particularly to talk about the introduction of one that has killed thousands and thousands of pages of regulation, and that would be the harmonized sales tax. That has eliminated 80,000 regulatory requirements and

burdens since 2008—a 17% reduction in red tape. It means that tax reforms have saved businesses from having to file two tax returns; now they only file one to one level of government. That, to me, is just one example, and I know my colleague from Peterborough will discuss more of the ways in which our government has reduced red tape and saved businesses money.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Todd Smith: I'm happy to speak on behalf of the private member's bill put forward by our friend from Chatham-Kent-Essex. His first private member's bill is a good one, despite what the other members have said. I think it's a fantastic piece of legislation, and it's something that we've heard about time and time again.

The member from Mississauga-Streetsville said that governments and opposition parties have been talking about it for years and years and years. The reason they've been talking about it for years and years and years is because it's a big problem and it continues to be big a problem, especially under the current government here in Ontario. So congratulations to our member from Chatham-Kent-Essex.

Our party, the PC Party, and our leader, Tim Hudak, take red tape very seriously. That's why our leader appointed me as the red tape critic and that's why our leader has also said that, in the next PC government, when it arrives, there will be a minister in charge of red tape. It's that cumbersome for our businesses in the province of Ontario.

The simple fact is that the government has made this bill necessary. This government has never really had a strategy for helping small business. They've relied on a series of one-offs and table scraps tossed at some of our most important job creators—and I meet with them every day in my small business portfolio. As a matter of fact, in eastern Ontario, 76% of the businesses there, in Prince Edward-Hastings and elsewhere—and I look forward to hearing the member from Peterborough talk because I know that he has a lot of small businesses in his riding that are struggling right now, and a lot of them have less than 10 employees. That's the definition of a small business. That means they don't qualify for the government's big corporate welfare schemes that exist right now. They just don't affect small businesses. Those small businesses need us, here in the Legislature, to reduce the regulation that they're trying to deal with. They need us to reduce their tax burden.

As the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex said, it's costing small businesses in the province of Ontario \$11 billion every year to deal with red tape. The CFIB, which he referenced a couple of times during his speech, says that it's costing small business owners six to 10 hours a week to deal with red tape issues and government bureaucracy. I think it's such a great idea that the member has come forward with this sunbeam list to shine a light on what exists in the province right now and the problems that our small businesses are facing.

This bill goes a long way to making government more accountable to small business owners across the prov-

ince, from Belleville to Chatham and from Toronto to Tobermory. It's an effort to help small business and I think it's a great effort.

Our small business owners and entrepreneurs in Ontario take enormous risks for the economy and they have to deal with over 380,000 different pieces of provincial red tape. That's just the red tape and regulations that exist here in the province. There are almost 600 agencies in the province of Ontario now. So we need action, and we need action today. I think it's great that this bill has come forward.

The Liberals have already sort of talked about the fact that this is a spend bill, but you may have to spend a tiny little bit to save a fortune, as a result of this bill. It's the kind of excuse that you hear when you don't really have an answer. That's what it is.

1500

Back in my OHL play-by-play days with the Belleville Bulls in the Ontario Hockey League, there was a goaltender who, on the back of his mask, actually had this quote. It said, "There are two things in life: results and excuses." We're getting excuses over there, but we would get results with this bill.

I think it's clear to anyone who has been paying attention that this government is short on results. There's no end to their excuses. Small businesses in Ontario need our help today, not in two years, after the ministry has commissioned a study—or promised to review it or hired more bureaucrats to analyze it then decided to ignore it because it proposed something the government didn't like.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to tell you a quick story about a seniors' residence that was being constructed in my riding. It was a great local project. It hired local tradespeople, used local contractors and local engineers. We're talking about four millimetres here, about the width of that finger. All of the light switches that were in the building had to be moved down this much—four millimetres—because of regulation.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Which finger was that?

Mr. Todd Smith: It was probably that one, actually. Four millimetres.

It would have cost that contractor hundreds of thousands of dollars to go through and fix them all. It's time the government got off the back of small business owners in the province of Ontario.

Congratulations to the member for a great bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I know the opposition were egging me on to get on the record this afternoon, and I am pleased to do so.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Is this about the Endangered Species Act?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Well, let me get to that in a moment, I say to the Minister of the Environment.

I really like and respect the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex. We've had some great conversations since the election of last October—

Hon. James J. Bradley: He has a Dale Carnegie voice.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Minister of the Environment, order, please.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I would have thought that the member might bring forward another private member's bill, one that the previous member, Mr. Hoy, had brought forward: the renaming of the riding to Chatham-Kent-Leamington, because Leamington, of course, is the only portion of Essex county that is indeed in that riding. May I suggest to the member that, down the road, he may want to bring forward that private member's bill, which would adequately reflect geographically the great history of Leamington in that riding. I know there would be unanimous support on this side of the House for that particular private member's bill, so I'll leave that with him.

But you know, Bill 62 is interesting. It talks about small businesses in the province of Ontario. By gosh, I just happen to have a letter here from a small business entity in Peterborough, and I want to get it on the record. It's from Dynacast, regarding the eastern Ontario development fund. This letter just came into my office May 7. It says:

"Dear Jeff"—very personal.

"The EODF program has come to a successful conclusion for us.

"We are grateful for the financial assistance that we received, which helped support investment in capital assets with respect to the Montreal business transfer and investment in automation equipment and facility improvement as well as other important initiatives. These initiatives have had a positive influence on the Peterborough plant in terms of revenue growth and increase in head count.

"On behalf of Simon Newman, our CEO; Adrian Murphy, our CFO; Herve Mallet, our general manager, and everyone in our plant, we want to thank you for your support.

"Regards,

"Bill Davie

"Vice-President

"Dynacast Ltd.

"Peterborough."

Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that is a great letter from a great success story of a small business in my community.

When I had town halls in Peterborough riding on the HST, the greatest thing that small businesses told me was to have one set of tax returns.

Hon. James J. Bradley: That's what Bob Runciman said.

Mr. Jeff Leal: That is what Senator Runciman said many years ago.

Interjection: Less paperwork.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Let me tell you, the advantage of that is less paperwork. At that particular time, they used to file their PST returns at one point of time in the calendar year; another point of time with regard to federal remittances for the GST—

Hon. James J. Bradley: That was red tape.

Mr. Jeff Leal: That was red tape, because you had to have two sets of accountants, two sets of books and lots of red tape. This was a way to have our own Red Tape Commission, to get rid of that red tape for small businesses.

I want to remind the member that there was a previous Red Tape Commission, and I want to talk about something very serious this afternoon.

If the members opposite will take the time to read the report of Justice Dennis O'Connor, Justice O'Connor did the review of the most tragic events in Walkerton, Ontario. If you take the time to review that royal commission, he went on to say that the Red Tape Commission had recommended the elimination of regulations within the Ministry of the Environment, which was one of the causes—I want to be fair here: one of the causes—that led to the tragic circumstances that happened in Walkerton.

I know that my friend from Chatham-Kent-Essex is very sensitive to that issue. It is in his part of Ontario, and I know he takes that very seriously. But on a more positive note—I want to be positive, because the member himself is a very positive guy—as part of the review of the standing orders, something the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly is looking at, I just want to refer to section 59.

Section 59, right now, deals with the estimates procedure. Something we may consider seriously is to take a look at maybe providing within the standing orders a way to review regulations, and that could be the purview of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, which I'm a member of, Mr. Bisson is a member of and the member from Nepean-Carleton is part of. This is a way to take a look at this issue—as I said, I want to be positive. We could take a look at this issue within the standing orders and maybe implement a mechanism that we already have in the standing orders, as it relates to estimates, to take a look at the kind of initiative the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex wants to look at.

Hon. James J. Bradley: As long as it doesn't gut the Endangered Species Act.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I say to my good friend the member from St. Catharines and the Minister of the Environment that we want to make sure we don't gut the Endangered Species Act, but I really want to say to my friend that this could go to committee to take a look at revising the standing orders to incorporate some of the good ideas he has.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm glad to speak on this bill put forward by my colleague from Chatham-Kent-Essex (Leamington).

Hon. James J. Bradley: Boy, is this a right-wing caucus now.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Oh, come on now. We've got to look back. The NDP made some good comments here, and I hope that Mr. Bisson, if he's adamant about his

changes—he's not talking; he's actually working forward to make the changes that he's proposing.

Overall, when we talk about reducing regulations, first and foremost in our minds here is safety. We would definitely not touch regulations that deal with safety. This bill basically is to deal with business regulations and red tape that's out there.

If you look back at the last eight years and where our province has evolved, we now have almost a doubling of our debt, our deficit is at \$15 billion and heading toward \$30 billion, and our unemployment has been the highest in Canada for the last 64 months.

Interjections.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: We need to work to get our economy back on track—yes, I'm getting heckled here. Yesterday we introduced our wage freeze legislation, and that's step one. Mr. Nicholls's bill is step two. We're going to start cutting regulations. If you talk to small businesses—I know the government on the other side isn't used to consulting with people. If you actually sit down and talk, they are concerned with regulations, because it actually hinders them growing, let alone forming a business.

I'll show you a few examples. I have a butcher in town, and his complaint is not with the regulations on safety; it's the problem that the regulations and red tape are ongoing changing and it's hard for him to even keep up. He's got to pull himself from working to deal with the ongoing changes to regulations that are occurring monthly. I think it's ridiculous for a small business to be having constant changes.

The other aspect of this bill that I like is the cost-benefit analysis. I think it's excellent to see how the bills and laws you're putting forward are going to affect business. I'm still waiting; I haven't heard yet when the government is going to table the cost-benefit analysis of the changes at WSIB for contractors or home building businesses, how that's going to affect them, considering they already have insurance to cover them that's private and cheap and covers them 24-7, whereas now they have to take out WSIB and probably have to cut down on whom they employ, because more money will be going toward covering them.

So I fully support—I'm not going to take my full minutes, because Mr. McDonell wants to take some time. **1510**

My last point is—this is just typical of the Liberal government's malaise to our economy—this morning we had a good question put forth by Chatham-Kent-Essex, and he was proud that CFIB gave us a B-minus rating. I think if you're the government in power, you should be continually aiming for an A plus, because that's what we deserve for the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I rise today to talk on Bill 62, the Legislative Oversight of Regulations Act, the sunbeam list, and support the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex.

Every day I hear from my constituents the problems they are having in completing almost any task in this

province. They question the merits of starting or running a business. While we must protect the interests of the province, there are literally hundreds of thousands of regulations—that's hundreds of thousands, 300,000 or 400,000. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, it costs our economy over \$11 billion a year. They also go on to say that reducing this regulatory burden on business is a clear way to jump-start Ontario's job creation ability and to boost our economic competitiveness.

Under this Liberal government, we now have many competitive disadvantages, causing our unemployment to be higher than the national average for more than five years, making Ontario a have-not province for the first time in history—another first for this government—truly a sad state of affairs.

But it is no wonder, when we are seeing things like the Green Energy Act, that has taken our electricity rate from one of the lowest in the world to the highest in North America by 2013—10 short years—our biggest advantage, squandered by this government. When we have such a surplus of power created under this McGuinty government, with the loss of over 300,000 manufacturing jobs, why are we paying guaranteed hydro rates that are more than 20 times more than what we can sell it for? Truly a failed experiment that is saddling us with billions of dollars of debt that our children and our children's children will have to pay off—all this, while we shut down nuclear plants and spill water over hydro dams, just to cut our old, established, cheap energy, green energy—that of nuclear and hydro—to reduce the amount of surplus power we are paying our neighbours and competitors to take from us—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Could I ask the member—

Mr. Jim McDonell: —so that we can accept this newer solar and wind energy at ridiculous levels.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Tie in your comments to the bill, quickly.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Okay.

Speaker, we must think of our future and start to look at ways to encourage and spark new businesses that will hire our youth and our many unemployed Ontarians—over 600,000—that this McGuinty government is responsible for, those who are looking to live the life that was available to our parents and ourselves, a life that is quickly becoming unaffordable and out of reach of our children.

This bill is just the first step that is required to bring this province back to its former proud status as the engine of the Canadian economy and a “have” province.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the members of this Legislature to support this bill for our children and our children's children and ourselves, so that our pensions and benefits, that we are counting on, will be available for us tomorrow and not removed as a condition of a bailout that is forced upon us by foreign interests, as we saw in Greece, because we can't afford this mushrooming debt that is being saddled upon us by this Liberal government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex, you have two minutes for a response.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I would like to thank all of my colleagues who, in fact, spoke favourably of this bill, although we may have some differing ideas with regard to this. I do appreciate, though, the additional light that the members shed on this sunbeam list that we talked about this afternoon. I truly do appreciate that.

But you know, Speaker, I'd just like to say a couple of things here. First of all, rising regulation, without proper stakeholder consultation, obviously costs businesses. It costs them a lot. As the Canadian Federation of Independent Business identified, it's costing small businesses throughout Ontario over \$11 billion right now.

Some may argue that this is a "cost" bill. Well, I can assure you that what it may cost to implement pales in significance to what it's currently costing small businesses throughout Ontario these days.

It's interesting to also note that when rising costs occur, it not only costs businesses, but they have to increase the cost of their goods and services, and those costs get passed on to the consumers, the taxpayers. Again, that's not fair at all.

In some cases, over-regulation has forced businesses to go out of business. That costs jobs. Or, in other ways, if they don't go out of business, sometimes they have to shut down certain profit centres because of over-regulation in an area that they are working in. So we do have a concern about that as well.

There was a comment made earlier that perhaps there are elements of this bill that are already in place and it's already working—so the comment was, "Well, then, why replicate it?" As much as I seriously respect the comments, let me remind the members that maybe it isn't working all that well because of the added costs too.

Again, I would like to thank everyone. I look forward to hearing a positive response.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. We'll take the vote at the end of regular business.

INHERITED HEART RHYTHM DISORDERS AWARENESS ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LA SENSIBILISATION AUX TROUBLES DU RYTHME CARDIAQUE HÉRÉDITAIRES

Mrs. McKenna moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 81, An Act to raise awareness about inherited heart rhythm disorders / Projet de loi 81, Loi visant à sensibiliser davantage le public aux troubles du rythme cardiaque héréditaires.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank my co-sponsors on this bill, the member from Oakville and the member from Hamilton Mountain, who have helped bring forward Bill 81, the Inherited Heart Rhythm Disorders Awareness Act, 2012. The intention of this bill is to raise awareness of the warning symptoms of sudden cardiac arrest in children and youth.

Inherited heart rhythm disorders are a silent killer, a group of rare diseases. Most young people who have IHRDs appear to be perfectly healthy and show no signs of this potentially lethal condition. For as many as half of the young people who IHRD kills, death is the first sign of this disease.

This legislation, among the first of its kind in North America, would greatly improve our ability to recognize early warning signs and take substantial steps to prevent needless tragedies.

Fabrice Muamba is a fearless young man. He grew up in the Democratic Republic of the Congo at a time when the country was rocked by civil war. During his teenage years, he escaped that conflict, fleeing to the UK with his family. Fabrice couldn't speak English when he arrived, but he was a quick study, both in school and on the field. He took to England's football culture quickly and enthusiastically. Just nine years after arriving, he was signing a multi-million pound contract with the Bolton Wanderers. He would go on to make around 150 game appearances for the club as a star middle fielder.

One match stands out. It was on St. Patrick's Day of this year. Just before halftime during a tied quarter-final match, Fabrice collapsed on the turf near the centre circle, cut down by a sudden cardiac arrest. Medics rushed to his aid. They tried unsuccessfully to revive him for 48 minutes, even before he arrived at the hospital. It ultimately took 78 minutes and 15 shocks to restart his heart. Doctors nearly pronounced him dead twice, but he survived.

Not all are so lucky. The last quarter-century has seen a number of high-profile deaths because of sudden cardiac arrest among young athletes. Some happen in the spotlight; most do not. In November 1995, 28-year-old champion pairs skater Sergei Grinkov, half of a beloved figure skating team that had won two Olympic gold medals, collapsed and died while on the ice with his wife and partner practising for the Stars on Ice tour.

1520

High-profile dramas like these summon the world to mourn as one. But medical specialists tell us that these cases are far more common than most of us realize. Pediatric sudden cardiac arrests claim the lives of some 120 young Ontarians under the age of 35 every year. IHRD is the leading cause of death in competitive athletes.

These cases strike at the heart of every community. On Halloween day in 2006, a 16-year-old boy collapsed and died in his classroom at a high school in my riding of Burlington. At this time, there were no defibrillators on school premises, so staff performed CPR, but to no

success. In the wake of that sudden, tragic death, an autopsy revealed that the young man had been living with an undiagnosed inherited heart rhythm disorder. There was one small mercy that emerged from this loss: Several family members, including a parent, uncles and cousins, have since been diagnosed with IHRD.

Not two months later, on Boxing Day in the same year, a 17-year-old Oakville high school student, an only child, collapsed and died on the ice while playing in a Christmas hockey tournament. Despite prompt CPR and the use of the arena's defibrillator, he did not survive. Yet, again, a young man's death had at least one positive legacy. Following her son's death, his mother tested positive for IHRD.

What's more, as a result of those two deaths, both school boards in Halton committed to placing defibrillators in all of the high schools. That decision would soon prove its worth, saving the life of a child. In the spring of 2010, a young woman was running track at an Oakville high school when she was gripped by sudden cardiac arrest and collapsed without warning. She was successfully resuscitated by staff and students performing CPR and using the school's defibrillator. She is still alive today, thriving, despite the serious and life-changing diagnosis of IHRD.

Later, in the summer of 2010, a 12-year-old Georgetown boy slipped into cardiac arrest while swimming in a neighbour's pool. Again, the event led to a broader diagnosis, and today that young man and his two sisters are living with diagnosed IHRD.

I could go on and on because stories like these, tragic or not, are far too common. They happen, on average, every three days to a young athlete who will be lost to sudden cardiac arrest brought on by inherited heart rhythm disorder, or IHRD.

Even so, the sudden and unexpected death of a completely healthy young person always knocks the wind out of us. The impact can be devastating for the family and the community. Along with the raw grief of friends and family, shock waves roll out through the community as students, school officials and health care workers struggle with the loss. Those closest to the loss cannot help but wonder what they could have done differently, what they might have done, to prevent a death. Who, if anyone, is to blame? At such times, we search for an answer to hold on to something, to steady ourselves, to make sense of an event that can strip the universe of meaning.

An enormous amount of research has been generated during the past 10 years evaluating the causes and events surrounding sudden cardiac arrest and screening mechanisms for identifying those at risk. We understand it better than ever today, but it is still mysterious enough to go undetected in most people. In the absence of symptoms, 95% of all sudden cardiac arrest victims will die on the scene. According to the American Heart Association, the chance of surviving sudden cardiac arrest drops by up to 10% with every minute that passes after the heart attack.

We have learned from young people who have survived a cardiac event that in about half of the cases,

fainting during physical activity is clearly a warning sign that can be just weeks or months prior to sudden cardiac arrest. Awareness of a timely response to telltale warning signs such as fainting, palpitation, and shortness of breath during physical activity can help us to prevent unnecessary deaths.

Bill 81, the Inherited Heart Rhythm Disorders Awareness Act, offers a straightforward prescription. It requires school boards and sport officials to call 911 and notify a child's parents or guardian if they suspect that a child has fainted during physical activity at a school or in an extracurricular activity.

Provincial sports organizations and their affiliate and member organizations must take reasonable steps to ensure that these requirements are met. That single phone call will lead to a simple ECG test that will determine whether IHRD is present. In 95% of cases it will merely be a faint, but where we find a genetic disorder, we have saved a life. In fact, we may have saved more than one life. The reason is that IHRD is a genetic disease, and quite often doctors will extend the diagnosis to other family members who, like the affected student, show no outward signs of the condition.

Bill 81 also provides that no action for damages may be commenced against a school board employee, coach, referee or other official associated with the sports organization for acts of omission committed in good faith. But it does, however, offer very clear guidelines for making sure that our young people can take part in these healthy, character-building pastimes with a greater degree of safety and security.

Three simple tools—preparedness, vigilance and timely response—can make a world of difference, give all of us more peace of mind and, most importantly, help prevent unnecessary deaths. We need not wait to make a diagnosis of IHRD. Having the coroner uncover the disease after a child has died is not the best option. Having a child lapse into cardiac arrest and then have to be resuscitated and pulled back to life is not the best diagnostic tool. We know that, in most cases, an early warning sign is a simple fainting spell. In a small but insignificant number of faints, particularly those associated with physical activity or emotional distress, these episodes can be red-flagged. We should recognize the red flag for what it is, and through the consistent application of low-cost and effective awareness strategies we can significantly reduce the toll of these diseases on Ontario families. Thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from Burlington for bringing this very important bill forward and for allowing me and the member for Oakville to co-sponsor it. I believe that it truly is a good bill.

The member from Burlington visited my office with a guest who we have in the House today. He was really great about explaining the importance of this bill and what it identifies to the children of our society of Ontario. That would be Mr. Blake Hurst. He's from public safety education coordination in Halton.

It's very important that we recognize things like this happening in our society and the fact that a small bill like this can raise awareness. It's very important to know that educating our teachers and our sports organizations will make a difference in saving lives of children throughout this province day after day.

Again, I'd also like to thank family members who are with us today, who were kind enough to be part of a media release this morning that brought this Bill 81 forward and brave enough to stand up for children in the future with the tragedy that they faced in their lives. All the best to them.

I'm very proud to stand for this because over 700 Canadians have died through this undiagnosed cardiac rhythm disorder, and at least half of them did show symptoms prior to death. Possibly a month or two previous to their having cardiac arrest, they were fainting or having dizziness, something to show that there was something going on in this child's life. A simple phone call to 911 and having that child tested through a simple ECG could have saved a life, and not just their life but the lives of family members who could also be carrying this disease, unknown to themselves. So it really is a huge bill in raising awareness.

1530

Like the member previous to me said, it's quite in line with Sabrina's Law, something that we know was passed through this Legislature also, something as simple as a peanut allergy. Now we know in schools that our kids don't go to school with peanut butter sandwiches, with peanut butter cookies, because it hurts children. Nobody knew about it. We all went to school with peanut butter sandwiches and nobody thought anything different of it. Today, none of our children go to school with peanuts, because of the awareness that was able to be brought forward with Sabrina's Law. That is something that we're very hopeful will happen with this bill being brought forward today.

It's as simple as calling 911, notifying the parents, making sure that there is a communication plan in place for them in the schools and that the schools are asking for this information, and to keep records on file that will travel with these children through school, through sports organizations, making sure that everybody is aware that there has been an issue with this child. That could save that child's life in the future. That child may be lucky, because for half of the children who do have a diagnosis or have fainted, there is no problem with them. So it's just about making sure, double-checking, crossing the t's, dotting the i's, making sure that we can possibly save every possible life in the meantime.

There have been children in Hamilton that have faced this also—healthy children, children in sports activities, children on the ice, children on soccer fields. We have adults who have had sudden cardiac arrest on a soccer field in the middle of a major game, and it could have been diagnosed if possibly there was something throughout the family history that could have been noted.

So it's a very important bill. I'm so proud of and thankful for all of the work that the member for Burling-

ton and her team have done on this and the backbone that they put behind it in making sure that we did get the press release this morning and that we are at the forefront, bringing it forward.

Like I said, there are children right across the province—young people in Hamilton. I have a story here from the *Spectator* about a child in 2007, a 13-year-old girl at school, a grade 8 student. It's so unfortunate. The list goes on and on. Of course, we won't name those people here today for the business of their personal families and how that would make them feel. But it has been an ongoing issue for many years.

Dr. Joel Kirsh has been leading the way on this through Toronto Sick Kids hospital, making sure that he's out there in the forefront on how much awareness we can bring forward.

Some of the symptoms to watch for, like the member before me said, are fainting, shortness of breath or palpitations just weeks or months prior to a serious occurrence happening, and making sure that we're just standing there, watching our children and knowing that we're on top of these things.

Key messages: It's as simple as requiring school employees and sports coaches to call 911 if the pupil or player is suspected of fainting during physical activities. So there isn't a lot that needs to be done after this bill. It's not about having any severe costs. It's an easy bill to enact. We really do hope and need everybody across the House to make sure that we're supporting that, and I know that's happening here today.

I'll give a few minutes to our health critic to say a few extra words on this. I know that I'm just 100% behind this and I would like, again, to thank our other members for joining in this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It is a pleasure today to rise in the House and join with my colleagues from two other parties. We often have different opinions, but on this, we don't have a different opinion; on this, we're united. We're three continuous communities: Oakville, Burlington, Hamilton. We've all come together, largely as a result of something happening that, as a parent, would be your worst nightmare.

In the member's gallery today, we're joined by two people that I met a few months ago and I got to know their very, very tragic story about their son Alex. Debbie and Alan Corrance are here with us today. The story that they told me about Alex was that he was a very athletic young man. He was 17; he was 6 foot 2 inches; he was 190 pounds—a strapping young man—and he was an elite athlete, the last person in the world you'd think would have something wrong with him. He was doing what he loved doing one day. He was playing hockey for a AAA team in Mississauga, the Rebels, a midget team, and he passed away during the game. The last thing you think of when you go into the hockey rink is that you may not be coming back. That's a young man in the prime of his life in a shape just—most of us would just

love to be in that kind of shape. I think it just highlights the diagnosis being so difficult to detect.

When you hear about something like this—and, as a parent, your heart goes out to other parents—you think, “Isn’t that awful. I wish we could do something about.” Often, we’re not able to do anything about it, but in this case, thanks to the work of the member from Burlington, she’s brought forward what I think are some very practical and implementable suggestions that we can all come together on in this House and do something about. What that is is that often, prior to a major event like this, there are little clues along the way. The member from Hamilton outlined one of them as fainting. If you’re undergoing some extreme physical exertion and you faint, often we just pass that off and say, “I guess the person blacked out,” and we just move on. What we’re suggesting is that that may be a clue, that that may be a hint that we need to do something about that.

We were fortunate today to be joined at the media release by Dr. Joel Kirsh. He gave us more of a medical side of things. He told us the things to look out for, but he also gave me a lot of hope that, if we’re able to pass this through the House, if we’re able to get this through committee, if we’re able to get this into our schools and into our athletic teams, we can do something that will save the lives of young men like Alex.

It’s not often as a Legislature that you get to do that type of thing. Often the things we deal with are very abstract in nature. They’re policy-driven. This is something that’s very practical. It could be implemented very easily because we’ve got a model that we can base it on, that being Sabrina’s Law, which I think has met with the approval of people around the province of Ontario. So we’ve got proof that this can work.

When we get Alan and Debbie coming to us, asking their legislators, their elected officials from all three parties to do something; when you’ve got people from all three parties who are prepared to do something, I think it’s incumbent upon this House to support this bill.

I know I’ve talked to the other members in my own caucus about it. I understand that it will receive support from all three parties today, and I think that’s a fantastic thing. So I’m urging members today to seize the opportunity that comes around maybe once every few years or few months. Let’s all pull together. There are two people in the gallery there who would like to see us do that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: I’m pleased to rise today in support of my Ontario PC caucus colleague, the member for Burlington, Jane McKenna, and Bill 81, An Act to raise awareness about inherited heart rhythm disorders.

I want to take a moment first to commend her for bringing this important piece of legislation. I want to join with the member for Burlington in also thanking the member for Hamilton Mountain and also the member for Oakville for co-sponsoring the bill.

1540

In my part of the province, in eastern Ontario, you can’t raise an issue of children’s health without saying

how fortunate we are to have the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario in the city of Ottawa. The doctors and nurses at CHEO are literally life-saving angels, who have graced the lives of so many families in my riding of Leeds–Grenville and in eastern Ontario. I know that the member for Ottawa–Orléans is here, and I’m sure he concurs with my statement.

I had the opportunity to visit the hospital’s website and learn about their arrhythmia clinic, a specialized unit for children who have, or who are at risk of having, an abnormal heart rhythm. It’s another example of the world-class treatment available at CHEO. But the key to ensuring that children get to that unit is to get help before tragedy strikes. That’s where I think Bill 81 can really, definitely make a difference.

Visiting the CHEO site, I was struck by the video that shows a young street hockey player—a fit and healthy-looking teen—collapse during a game. As a parent, it’s quite a disturbing scene.

But what’s more shocking is to know that a child could faint during physical activity and it might not be reported. It may be dismissed as too much activity, maybe a bit of over-exertion in the heat. If that happens, a coach or a teacher needs to take those extra steps to notify the child’s parents, which, obviously, as some members have already stated, could ultimately result in saving that young life. By simply requiring that a 911 call is made and that a child’s parents are notified, Bill 81 ensures that that warning sign is heard loud and clearly. When those steps are taken, a child gets to a CHEO and gets that treatment that they need.

I urge everyone who is here to go to the CHEO website to watch that video, and also to take time to explore the Canadian SADS Foundation website, to see the pictures of some of those approximately 700 young Canadians whose lives are lost every year to sudden arrhythmia death syndrome. If you do that, I think you’ll understand why this bill is so crucial. It’s a very reasonable measure to address an important issue affecting the health and well-being of our children.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak in favour of Bill 81, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is a pleasure for me to add my voice to those who have spoken before me about this important act, Bill 81.

Every now and again in this House, we have an opportunity to do some good, and I think this afternoon is going to be one of those opportunities, where people on all sides of the House can see that we can use the spotlight, if you’ll allow me to call it that way, that the Legislature can bring to an issue, and use this for the good of the people of Ontario.

This afternoon, through working together on all sides of the House, we will share a spotlight on this important issue and, hopefully, that spotlight will grow throughout the province so that, as has been said before, we will be able to save lives, we will be able to identify people with

inherited heart rhythm disorders and keep them from having an actual heart attack.

I, too, wanted to share a story. My husband is a firefighter and also a first responder. I will always remember—my kids were still in high school at the time and were part of the track and field team. The team was preparing for a big meet. They were doing one of the long runs through the bush in Sudbury when my husband got the call. The call was that one of the young runners had collapsed, way far into the bush, and somebody needed to go get him.

I will always remember that day, because we had bought new sneakers for our son—we paid a whole lot of money—and this kid happened to have the same running shoes we had just bought the week before. It was not our son—it was a member of the team—but it could have been. So that kind of stuck with us.

There had been warning signs, but people didn't know. After the fact, everybody looked back and said, "How come we didn't know? How come we didn't act before?" Well, because the awareness was not there. Nobody knew. I'm not here to blame them. They would have gladly helped save that child, but nobody knew.

Now, today, we have a chance to tell every Ontarian in this province that if a child—and 50% of them will have symptoms; 50% of them will have fainting spells, will say that they don't feel good. That should trigger a red flag to the coach, to the teachers right away. Don't let that go by. Use the power that you have to share that information. Do call. Let them know they have to seek medical treatment.

It's an easy task. An ECG doesn't hurt, doesn't do anything. It's fast and it will give you information, and in health care, information is power. The minute you know, then you can act and you can do what we all want to do: Help one another live healthy, long lives.

Once you have been diagnosed, once you know, you will learn to cope with it. You will learn to live a happy, long, healthy life. But when you don't know, then first responders and people working in the ambulance business will continue to get the call that a young, healthy, fit, beautiful, young human being has collapsed in the middle of a sports event. They're often good athletes and, all of a sudden, they are gone. It is a tragedy every time this happens, and a tragedy that is preventable.

Here, today, by putting our efforts together, by shining a light on this issue, we will prevent that. Let's pull together and do that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Whenever I look at a bill, I like to look at the facts and the evidence. We have so many health situations in our province, I think, that are worthy of consideration for a bill to be put forward, probably more than are coming forward now.

So I did my homework and I talked to some of my colleagues in the medical profession. I also thought about children and youth in our province, as a mother, as a parliamentary assistant for children and youth, and as an

advocate for childhood diseases, which sometimes statistically do not show a compelling picture. For example, children with childhood cancers are a very small population relative to the adult population, but when I look at that, I think about the future of our children and advocating for their future.

I think this bill, An Act to raise awareness about inherited heart rhythm disorders, is similar to that. It's similar to our concussion bill we brought forward. I think sometimes we focus too much on the smaller numbers associated with childhood illnesses and incidents. We also view our children as very resilient and strong, and most of them are, thankfully. But similar to our concussion bill, I think sometimes we forget that there could be a problem; that if something happens, like fainting, it could be a symptom of another problem. Getting kids back out on a sports field or returning them to the classroom too quickly is where we run into trouble, whether it's concussions or what we're talking about here today, Bill 81, to raise awareness about inherited heart rhythm disorders. So I want to congratulate the MPPs from Burlington, Oakville and Hamilton Mountain on bringing this forward.

I think the evidence is compelling in this case. The diseases we're talking about here today in Bill 81 are among the leading causes of death in pediatric and young persons, so there's evidence there, Speaker. Secondly, in more than half of young people that are affected by this, it kills, and death is the first expression of this disease.

So again, I think it's compelling, even if statistically it's smaller relative to the adult population.

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In fact, I have a member of my staff who had a very serious heart condition at a young age. He was lucky to be treated at a very young age and is doing great now. But he might have been the exception because there wouldn't have been legislation such as this to embed some practices in the school setting.

I know first-hand, as a chair of school community councils for years and years in my community of Pickering-Scarborough East, that the health and safety of our students is as important as the education curriculum. When you come right down to it, safety actually sometimes is job one in the school, and educating them is a really close second.

I think this bill supports the health and safety of our children. It's a well-thought-out bill that will, I think, prevent illness and injury. It will cause everyone in the system to be aware that something might be a symptom of a bigger problem. Again, I congratulate my colleagues for bringing this forward.

I think that's all I'm going to say at this point because I'm going to share my time with my other colleagues. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to rise today and speak in support of Bill 81, the Inherited Heart Rhythm Disorders Awareness Act, put forth by my

colleague from Burlington. I'm so pleased to stand because it's the right thing to do. I know, as a parent, this is near and dear to my colleague's heart. I want to congratulate her for tabling and debating and hosting the media awareness session earlier today because this piece of legislation is an important issue we all need to be aware of and to talk about.

It's something that I'm familiar with in the sense that both my mother and my two sisters each have heart murmurs, if you will. So we're very tuned in to this particular issue. We can't look away from the fact that sudden cardiac arrest occurs in young, otherwise healthy people who have a genetically inherited heart rhythm disorder. These folks appear to be healthy. What I think is important are some of the measures in this bill, because we have to make people more aware that sudden cardiac arrest can happen at any time to any person.

I've been blessed with a very sports-loving family. We've been absolutely spoiled by our experiences in both hockey and fastball. But I'll never forget the day that I arrived at an arena and the trainer came running for us because Deidra was in the dressing room in tears, she was having such fast heart palpitations. There's nothing more fearful than seeing somebody so distressed and knowing you can't do anything about it. When all the tears dried and we settled things down, we found out that she had an energy drink ahead of practice. That's a whole discussion for another day, but it made me very, very much aware of how drastic this can be. It just absolutely breaks my heart when IHRD makes the news due to a young person collapsing doing something they absolutely love.

That is why Bill 81, introduced today, is so important. This bill requires all school employees to call 911 when a student is suspected of fainting while performing a physical activity. This is important because the symptoms of sudden cardiac arrest can be blamed on dehydration, malnourishment, exhaustion, and quite simply some of these students may not be getting the timely help they need if they're in cardiac arrest. We have to be aware.

An important and distinguishing feature of this disease is that most patients are otherwise healthy and show no outwards signs of the potentially lethal disease. For more than half of the young people that IHRD kills, death is the first expression of this disease. This is one of the leading causes in the death of young people. I have to commend my colleague for standing up for these young people. It can be a silent killer.

If passed, this legislation would be the first of its kind, to my understanding, in North America, which shows that my colleague from Burlington is forward-thinking and has a true sense of caring and compassion for children and their families. I also want to thank the members from Oakville and from Hamilton Mountain for adding your names to this very important bill and showing your support for my colleague and her initiative.

This bill will be leaving a legacy for the young kids who have experienced this particular disease, and it will

improve our ability to recognize early warning signs and take decisive steps to prevent needless tragedies.

Again, I congratulate the member from Burlington, and I applaud you for your initiative, which will no doubt save lives of our young people in the future. Thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to join the debate and to support the measure introduced by my colleague from Burlington. This Legislature has, in the past, passed similar legislation, and I do hope this will pass and be enacted into law.

We've spoken, as members, very eloquently about the effect on young athletes, but there's a part of the bill that, to quote directly from the explanatory note, "requires coaches, referees and other officials associated with sport organizations to call 911, and to inform a child's parent or guardian if the child is suspected of fainting while playing or practising the sport." What I'd like to focus on in this last two and a half minutes of debate from the government side is the impact on organizers of a league.

Many of my friends who have coached minor hockey have said that they have absolutely loved the experience of coaching, were it not for the parents. They've enjoyed working with the kids. But what this gives the organizers and the referees and the coaches is that reminder that something that may otherwise simply be written off: "What happened to Tim?" "He fainted." "Okay. Well, let's get him back on his feet, because his shift is coming up." Or "What happened to this one?" "Well, you know, she just sort of stumbled and fell down after the race. I guess she was just kind of tired out."

Now, you probably wouldn't think a great deal about it as the coach, because you're trying to think in terms of, "What about my next group of kids who are going over the boards, going onto the field or swimming the next heat?"—one of my other sports was swimming. You wouldn't, in the absence of a measure like this, have reason to suspect that anything could be wrong with a young athlete whom you would normally picture as being the picture of health.

What this bill says is, remember something that may happen, think about what to do if a child faints. That little bit of training and that note in your certification procedures, in your league manual, in the things you brief your refs on if you're coordinating referees, in your coaching clinics if you're working with coaches, in dealing with other leagues if you're a league executive, that says, "Now, this is just a short thing that I want to bring you coaches, parents, referees up to date on. The following things happen." And we walk through some of the scenarios so eloquently described by some of the other speakers here, as my colleagues have said very accurately and very poignantly. That little bit of instruction given to a coach, given to a league executive, does make the difference between life and death for a young athlete who may in every other way show no symptoms whatsoever.

I think the first coach or manager or league executive who finds that a child has been diagnosed with this particular condition will say: "In the absence of knowing that, we may not have known what to do to cause that young person to survive. In the absence of knowing that, this person may have died." If there is no other single benefit that the measure brought forth by my colleague from Burlington will do, I think that alone makes it worth supporting, and I'll vote for it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I rise to support the member from Burlington, and I'm quite happy to see the members from Hamilton Mountain and Oakville supporting this bill.

There are more than 130 cases a year, and sadly, 10 years ago, in my riding, at St. Joseph's high school in Cornwall, where my wife worked then and still does today, one of the school's top athletes, Bryanne Champagne, collapsed and died without warning.

We can only imagine the shock to her family as their healthy young child with only the brightest of futures was suddenly gone, especially when we know today that there may be a simple warning sign that most times goes unnoticed.

1600

When my brother and closest friend died suddenly in an accident 30 years ago, it severely affected our family. I saw the extreme pain that my parents went through.

If there's any answer to this problem, I think it's up to us to act on it and, with these children who have gone before, not to let them die in vain. Through their deaths, we now see that there is science behind it that tells us that there is a solution. So I encourage everybody to take the step and encourage this bill. I thank the members for bringing it forth.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I am also pleased to rise in support of Bill 81, An Act to raise awareness about inherited heart rhythm disorders, and I truly would like to thank my colleague the member from Burlington for bringing this forward and to thank the members from Oakville and Hamilton Mountain for their considerable support.

I'd also like to thank the guests who are here with us today, particularly Mr. and Mrs. Corrance. I truly hope that this will give you some small measure of comfort, knowing that we're discussing this today in a collegial way. That doesn't always happen here, but we recognize the importance of this issue, and we really want to make sure that other families know about it and can learn from this as well.

I'd like to thank all my colleagues for being here today and being so respectful of each other as we've talked about this issue.

I really have been interested in hearing the stories that other members have recounted. I have two quick stories myself. One is that I also have a heart rhythm disorder. It was discovered many years ago when I was in my early

teens. It's called paroxysmal atrial tachycardia, for the expert who is here today. It was quite frightening; I thought I was having a heart attack. It was when I was at school in grade 9. I was quickly checked out, and it was discovered to be quite benign. I have attacks from time to time, but I know how to control it now. That was something that was quickly checked out and was found to be okay.

On the other hand, we had a young man who was working in our law firm where I was practising law before I came to this place—he was a very talented young man. He was articling with our firm. We had just offered him a full-time job with us when he graduated. He and his wife were celebrating; they had just bought a house, and they were expecting their first child. He went out to play a game of floor hockey with a group of friends and collapsed and died because of an IHRD. It was something that hit all of us very hard at our law firm, especially given the fact that his wife delivered a child a few months later without a dad—all of which points to the need to have greater public awareness of the need to be checked out for these things. In some cases, they can be quite benign, as in my case; in other cases, they can be treated if they're detected very early on.

Bill 81 does do that, in the sense that it requires that in a case where someone is practising a sport at school, if there's a fainting spell, which is often one of the first symptoms, they get that checked out very early on; that the parents are notified. Often some things that happen in the course of sports—and I'm the mother of three sons who played a lot of sports in school; things happen that you just shrug off and you think don't matter. Well, you do need to have these things checked out.

Any public awareness that can come as a result of this bill, I think, is a good thing and probably one of the better things that we do in this Legislature on a daily basis.

Again, I'd like to thank everyone concerned. I think it's safe to say that everyone is going to support this bill. I think that's good for all of us here and for the people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Burlington, you have two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I'd like to thank everyone—my co-sponsors, the member from Oakville and the member from Hamilton Mountain. I'd also like to thank my colleagues from Whitby-Oshawa, Leeds-Grenville, Huron-Bruce and Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

But I'd like to, first and foremost, from the bottom of my heart, thank the passion and the love from Alan and Debbie Corrance for your son Alex. I am a facilitator here for you, but the people sitting over there are the people that need—are the heroes—Blake Hurst, Mary Lewis, Dr. Joel Kirsh; again, because you're the people with the passion and the love who have brought this forward and continue with your passion to bring this to the Legislature so we here can move this forward for you.

We're only as good as our team. We are a wonderful team in here today, and I'm grateful to be part of this House today. This is probably one of my proudest moments. For that, we will move forward with this, and I thank everyone from the bottom of my heart today for all that they've done. Thank you, and God bless.

VISITORS

M^{me} France Gélinas: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I beg the indulgence of the House to introduce a very good friend of mine, Hélène Campbell, with her mother Manon, and my legislative assistant, Damien Waddell. I wish them welcome to Queen's Park.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much. As the member knows, it's not a point of order, but welcome to the Legislature.

The time for private members' public business has expired.

ONTARIO SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR L'ASSOCIATION DES INGÉNIEURS DE L'ONTARIO

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We'll deal first with ballot item number 40, standing in the name of Mr. Kwinter.

Mr. Kwinter has moved second reading of Bill 15. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Kwinter?

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Agreed? Agreed.

LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT OF REGULATIONS ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LA SURVEILLANCE LÉGISLATIVE DES RÈGLEMENTS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Nicholls has moved second reading of Bill 62. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a couple of noes.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Speaker, I'd like to refer my bill to finance.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Agreed? Agreed. So referred.

INHERITED HEART RHYTHM DISORDERS AWARENESS ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LA SENSIBILISATION AUX TROUBLES DU RYTHME CARDIAQUE HÉRÉDITAIRES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mrs. McKenna has moved second reading of Bill 81. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Social policy committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be referred to social policy. Agreed? Agreed.

Orders of the day?

Hon. James J. Bradley: As Steve Clark would like to say, I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The government House leader has moved adjournment of the House. Agreed? Agreed.

This House is now adjourned until Monday, May 28, at 10:30 a.m.

I would like to say to all of you, please have a good week off for constituency week. Thank you.

The House adjourned at 1608.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Brotten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre de Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Damerla, Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development and Innovation / Ministre du Développement économique et de l'Innovation Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Deputy Premier / Vice-premier ministre Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
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No. 56

N° 56

ISSN 1180-2987

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 40th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 28 May 2012

Lundi 28 mai 2012



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 28 May 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 28 mai 2012

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'd like to welcome here today Megan, the only daughter of the member from Oxford. She's in the audience, and her friend Ben Stole is here with her. On behalf of myself and all the members of the Legislature, I would like to welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to introduce Darlene Bowen, my constituency assistant, who has come from Temiskaming Shores to check up on me.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to introduce James Rice and Kerry Rice, representing the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'm very pleased to welcome in the gallery, from Kenora, Ontario, Tannis Drysdale, her beautiful daughter Alice Johnston, her brother Rob Drysdale and her nephew Ian Drysdale.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: We have two guests from Northumberland—Quinte West here this morning, Carol Blaind and Corey Scott. We'd like to welcome them to Queen's Park.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Speaker, would you please help me welcome Drew Phillips, who won a certificate in an auction to have lunch with me today. He's with the Launch Lab located at Innovation Park in Kingston.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Speaker, we welcome Jeff and Debbie Carr. Their daughter Annaleise is a newly installed page, and their daughter is hosting fundraisers for her upcoming swim across Lake Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome, and good luck.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Good morning. I'd like to extend a warm welcome to youth and organizers from the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, representing 45 children's aid societies across Ontario. They're here this morning to participate in their annual youth civics day, to see first-hand where and how government happens. I invite my colleagues to join me after question period in room 228 at noon for the youth civics day reception.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Introduction of guests?

I am very pleased that there's a lot of chitchat going on, catching up for time lost. I would ask two things.

Number one, for our guests, when we do participate here on the floor, we ask our guests, whom we value, not to participate in any way, shape or form in the debates by applauding, making noise or protesting. Next, I offer—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): They're still catching up.

In the members' gallery we have, joining us here to see page Sam in action, Sam's mother, Feng Bai, from Kitchener-Waterloo. Welcome.

It is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Premier. Last Wednesday, your finance minister said you need to get this budget passed because it's "what the credit rating agencies are looking for." But this is the same budget that got our credit rating downgraded and moved to a negative watch, and this is the same budget that has over \$1 billion in new taxes and spending. Premier, if you're truly concerned with what the credit rating agencies are looking for, why are you continuing to push forward a budget bill that's been completely rejected by those same credit rating agencies?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, Mr. Speaker, the credit rating agencies all endorsed the plan themselves. Their fear is that this Legislature won't allow it to pass, and I think that is a legitimate fear, given the intemperate response of the official opposition in particular.

It turns out that the official opposition decided to vote against the budget before they read it, and now we find out from the third party that they may not vote for it after they read it, and they may not have read it.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we need to pass this budget. It's the right plan for a better future for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Premier, while over 500,000 Ontarians remain out of work and our debt continues to spiral out of control, it's clear from the answer given by the finance minister that you still don't get what's necessary in order to bring Ontario back on track.

Last Wednesday, the Minister of Finance showed how out of touch he is when he warned that if this budget bill isn't passed quickly, the \$1-billion Liberal-NDP tax-and-spend scheme won't come into effect. That's the same

tax-and-spend plan that the minister admitted that he didn't want the credit rating agencies to see.

Premier, what is it going to take for you to finally realize the magnitude of the mess that you've gotten Ontario into?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The official opposition wants to cut taxes at a time when we want to get back to balance, Mr. Speaker, and protect the important gains we've made in health care and education. Our priorities are very different from theirs, and we have laid out a plan to get back to balance.

Let me just read to the member opposite some quotes from those credit rating agencies. DBRS says that they view "the continuation of the fiscal recovery plan and the increasing emphasis on cost containment as an encouraging step in the right direction." Moody's says that they recognize "that the province has laid out"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I am going to start immediately naming individuals, and if you don't think I'm serious, go ahead and say something when I'm standing.

Minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Moody's says that they recognize "that the province has laid out an ambitious fiscal plan to return to fiscal balance," and Standard and Poor's says, "Supporting the ratings are what we view as Ontario's large, wealthy, and well-diversified economy...."

Mr. Speaker, we've laid out the right plan. It will get this province back to balance. Unlike the opposition, we're going to protect the improvements—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: The fact of the matter is, the credit rating agencies hear the words but they are waiting to see whether this government actually has the ability to put them into action, and they're very, very—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Peterborough, come to order.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: This government talks about taking strong action, but all we've seen is another credit downgrade. Your government talks about getting public sector salaries under control, but your voluntary wage freeze has been a complete, unmitigated disaster. Your government talks about getting spending under control, but all we've seen are creative ways to increase revenue.

Premier and Minister of Finance, if you really believe this is an urgent problem, why will you not support our legislation on public sector wage freezes coming forward on Thursday?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Simply put, Mr. Speaker, their plan won't work. They choose to ignore court rulings; they choose to ignore the legal imbrolios other governments have put themselves into, Mr. Speaker. They want to pretend that in fact they can simply impose a wage freeze in the context of a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that has redefined the legal landscape. So we are taking careful, deliberate steps to move towards balance, working with our partners across the broader public—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Frontenac is warned.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: —across the public and broader public sectors to, in fact, achieve balance and continue to make the important investments in health care and education that all Ontarians want us to make in the interests of a better province for all of our citizens.

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ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is to the Premier. For months the Ontario PC caucus has been urging you to take decisive action to get your spending under control. Your strategy was to ask government employees to make cuts to their own salaries, because you don't have the guts to do it yourself. Yet despite the fact that this voluntary wage freeze idea is blowing up in your face, you continue to dodge the issue and play games with Ontario's financial future. For months, we've been calling for a legislated public sector wage freeze, and this Thursday our party is putting forward a bill to legislate a public sector wage freeze.

Premier, will you show Ontarians that you understand the urgency of Ontario's situation and support our legislation this Thursday?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: No, Mr. Speaker, we won't support it. It won't work. The Leader of the Opposition was in Alberta last week—a government that's running a deficit—and they don't have a legislated wage freeze, nor does the federal government. In fact, the federal government had a legislated wage increase, Mr. Speaker, and they are now defending that, having, by the way, consulted, having done all kinds of negotiations. They're now defending a number of court actions, the outcomes of which are at best questionable.

Mr. Speaker, we've laid out the right plan to get back to balance. The Minister of Health, for instance, has by regulation taken some important steps on capping fees for doctors. There are ongoing discussions going on with limited bargaining, very limited bargaining mandates, with teachers. The plan we've laid out is the right one and it will get Ontario back to balance.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: You know, in your nine years in government you have proven that you are not up to the job of managing government spending. Public sector salaries are completely out of control. The sunshine list has grown from 20,000 to 80,000, a 400% increase in just eight years, while government employees are earning 27% more than Ontarians working in the private sector, for doing exactly the same job. Your approach to every problem is, when in doubt, spend. That is not how Ontarians manage their finances, and it's not how they want their government to manage the province's finances.

Today we are asking you to take a new and revolutionary approach. Minister, just once, don't spend at the problem; deal with the problem. This is a matter of

leadership. Will you show that the urgency has finally dawned on you and will you please support our bill to legislate a wage freeze?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: No. It's a flawed bill, a flawed strategy that will result in failure, a failure that's similar—

Interjections.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: You know, it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, when one goes back and—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member from Nepean—Carleton will come to order.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: When one looks back, that member was part of a government that raised the debt 40% on their watch. To date, we've raised it 32%. And they did it at a time of unprecedented economic growth, Mr. Speaker. Our plan is the right plan to get the budget back to balance, having responded to the legitimate challenges in the world economy, based on the advice given to us by the IMF and OECD. Those are the right steps now. This budget is the right step to a better future for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Minister, you have proven better than most that it's easy to spend money. But one of the credit rating agencies has already downgraded Ontario's rating, and last week your government worried aloud about further downgrades if your budget isn't passed. We can sit here till hell freezes over, Minister, but facts are facts. We are staring down the barrel of a \$30-billion deficit and a \$400-billion debt. Our public sector wage freeze legislation, which we will present on Thursday, will save the province \$2 billion. You need this money, Minister. Ontario needs this money. Will you do the right thing and finally take action?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The action we've laid out in the budget is the right action to get back to balance and also to protect the important investments we have made in health care and education, because those are the services Ontarians demand, Mr. Speaker. We reject their approach. We are not going to do the sorts of things they do. We don't want to close hospitals; they do. They want to support the horse racing industry; we want to support schools, Mr. Speaker. They make up numbers around the budget deficit, Mr. Speaker—

Interjection.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: He just did it again. The Auditor General said quite differently about the deficit. Our plan is the right plan. Your wage plan won't work. It won't achieve what you say it will. This government has the plan to build Ontario a better future, building on our successes in health and education.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. During the election and practically every day since, I've made it clear that I believe that we can work together to get things done in a minority Legislature. Now, last

week the government ministers began rattling the election cages once again. I think there's a lot of work to be done here, Speaker, not out on the campaign trail. Does the Premier agree with me?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I appreciate the sentiment that informs our honourable colleague's observations here today. I think that on a regular basis we need to ask ourselves, what do Ontarians expect of us? They expect us to find common ground and to build on that ground together.

That's why I was so heartened by the opportunity to meet with the leader of the NDP and to establish a firm agreement that we will work together to move this budget through. Our preference is that we do this at the earliest possible opportunity, for many reasons. The fact of the matter is, I'm proud of the fact that we did, in the end, find common ground working with the third party.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, does the Premier also agree that tax measures like the freeze on corporate taxes and the NDP's fairness tax on high-income earners should be in place by July 1?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We look forward to moving ahead with the entire budget. We don't intend to pick and choose certain aspects of the budget. These were not issues that were raised by my honourable colleague at the time of our meeting. We had a couple of meetings. We had a good opportunity to put our concerns on the table. Those of this nature were not raised at that point in time.

I fully expect that my honourable colleague will in fact do what we have both agreed to do. We both added a little water to our wine. There was quid pro quo. She did make certain requests of us. We had one basic request of the NDP, which was to work with us to pass this budget, and we look forward to doing that before the House rises.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, now I'm going to ask the Premier straight out to clear the record: Did New Democrats promise to help the government shut down debate and cancel public hearings on their 300-page omnibus bill? And if not, why does he think we would want to do that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, what I can say is that we have devoted considerable time to ensuring that we can have a debate with respect to our budget. We're talking about ensuring, going forward, that there also be even more time. In fact, what I can say is there will be more debate devoted to this budget than the previous eight that we had presented in this chamber, here in our province. So I think we're prepared to do what is necessary to ensure that we have all the time that we need for concerns to be expressed and recommendations to be offered. But ultimately, we must move ahead with this budget.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. The people who elected us want us to keep

working on the challenges that they're facing. They're worried about parents who are waiting for health care, or whether daycare is going to be there for their children when they need it. And they don't want another mess like the one that we've been watching unfold with Ornge. Basically, they want us to do our jobs, not rubber-stamp a 300-page omnibus bill before people have a chance even to look at it.

The Premier says he won't support our move to fast-track some of those key budget measures that are going to be necessary. Is he ready, then, to look at other ways that we can get the results that people expect from us?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I want to quote my honourable colleague from her post-budget vote media availability on April 24, when she said, "We are going to allow the budget to go forward and proudly say to Ontarians, 'We did some things to make it better for you.'" She was right then, and she is right today, if she adheres to the sentiments that informed that statement.

I say this, and again I commend my colleague: We did come together; we did find some common ground; we did add some water to our wine. There was an exchange of considerations, to use legal terminology; there was quid pro quo. They asked that we make some changes; we did that, Speaker. The purpose of making those changes was so that we could move ahead with our budget.

I think my honourable colleague understands what is at stake with respect to some tax considerations. I think it's in the interests of Ontarians that we do what we agreed to do, which is to move ahead with our budget.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This morning we got a real example of why exactly we need to look carefully at the government's omnibus 300-page bill. Legal experts who looked at the bill say that it could be used to bypass—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Eglinton—Lawrence, come to order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —the Legislature and hold a fire sale of public assets without any public debate. That's buried in that bill, Speaker.

Now, does the Premier plan to sell off the LCBO? Does he plan to sell off the OLG in a fire sale? And if not, then he should be agreeing with us that we need hearings and amendments to his 300-page bill.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, we have agreed to provide those kinds of hearings. I say to my honourable colleague that there will be no fire sales. She will know that we have in the past looked at the kinds of things that she has talked about just now; that we have rejected those.

Having said that, we do think that we can look for opportunities to better introduce private sector support for ServiceOntario. We think that's a responsible move on our part so that we can find, again, savings and efficiencies so that we can give life to the priority that we've attached to our schools and our health care.

So as we look for savings and efficiencies, let's remember what the objective is here: It is to ensure that we're protecting the gains we've made in our schools, protecting the gains we've made in our health care and, over the course of time, to pay down our deficit.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: New Democrats have been very clear. We want to get some results for the people who sent us here: the working parents who need child care or the families who are worried about losing health care. They're not going to be helped by the same old politics, and they're certainly not going to be helped by another Ornge unfolding in this province.

Is the Premier ready to do the hard work to make the minority government work, or can we expect more of the same rhetoric, leading to the exact same results?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I remind my honourable colleague that we made close to a billion—over \$1 billion, in fact, of expenditure changes as a result of the advice that we received from her. We made changes to ODSP. We added to that our increase in social service assistance, as well—

Interjection.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: —and OW, Speaker.

There was a corporate tax issue which we both agreed on. There was the tax on Ontario's wealthiest, which we moved ahead with at the insistence of my honourable colleague the leader of the NDP.

The fact is, we did find common ground. I think the result of that was a better budget for the people of Ontario, and now our shared responsibility is to ensure that we move ahead with a budget that we built together.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. I believe we're getting closer to the reason why the Premier and his cabinet want the Ornge air ambulance scandal suppressed.

This weekend, I just happened to come across a document prepared for Management Board of Cabinet by the emergency health services branch of the Ministry of Health dated October 15, 2004. That document could not be more clear: Someone at a very high level was manipulating the Mazza scheme through the cabinet approvals process, against the advice and warnings of senior civil servants. According to the cabinet document, there were too many risks and the supporting arguments in favour of the Mazza scheme were highly questionable.

I'd like to ask the Premier this: Why did he and his cabinet sell out Ontario's air ambulance service to Dr. Mazza for \$1 against the advice of senior civil servants in the Ministry of Health and in the Ministry of the Attorney General?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Interjections.

Hon. John Milloy: It's always nice to be popular, Mr. Speaker.

I find it a little passing strange that the member would stand up and say that we were somehow suppressing individuals looking into Ornge. The public accounts committee, by a motion that was supported by this side of the Legislature, is holding hearings into the Ornge matter. The public hearings have now sat for 29 hours; 33 witnesses have appeared. In fact, this Wednesday, in the morning, Tom Rothfels, former COO of Ornge International, will be appearing; at 12:30, Tom Lepine, the former COO of Ornge, will be appearing.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to stress that they have extended the number of hours that those witnesses could come forward, as is their right as a committee of this Legislature—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, I have just delivered this cabinet document to the Premier, who didn't want anything to do with it, so he sent it over to the House leader. Now that the House leader has the document, I'd like to ask him this. That document gives 15 specific reasons as to why the Mazza scheme should never have been approved. I quote from the document that was before the Premier that he just shuffled off to the House leader—but they've all seen it when they were in cabinet.

It states, "The stated bases for the recommendation are insubstantial" and "don't provide a compelling argument...." The background information is "selective and insufficient...."

Surely, someone around the cabinet table would have seen this quote as a warning sign: "The critical issue of what the role of the ministry will be in the new regime and the degree of control that will be retained by the ministry has still not been sufficiently addressed...."

I call on the Premier to stand and answer for himself: Is this how he and his cabinet make decisions on all matters? Or what was—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: You know, Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite insists on conducting hearings on the floor of this Legislature, then I would like to ask some questions.

I'd like to know about how it came to pass that Ornge established—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I might just give a blanket warning.

Carry on.

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to know how it came to pass that Ornge established a new satellite operation at Oshawa Municipal Airport. You know what we found out, Mr. Speaker, through the public accounts hearings? A former Ornge executive, the senior aviation expert there, said he opposed the move and that it was a very poor choice for a host of reasons. That didn't stop the member for Whitby—Oshawa lobbying. We've seen that

snazzy photo. Mr. Speaker, we also have a letter here from the member from Durham, who says, "I would like to briefly highlight the advantages of relocating Ornge to a base at the Oshawa airport rather than at the Peterborough site."

FIRE SAFETY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, on behalf of the New Democratic Party, I wish to extend our condolences to the families and friends of the elderly couple who lost their lives in the Hawkesbury retirement home fire on Friday. These deaths occurred in a retirement home without an automatic sprinkler system and took place on the same day that a coroner's inquest investigating a fatal 2009 fire in Orillia recommended the retroactive installation of sprinklers in retirement homes. This was the fourth such inquest on separate fires.

How many more families will lose their loved ones before this government mandates automatic sprinklers in all requirement homes?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to second the sentiment expressed by my honourable colleague when it comes to the terrible and tragic loss of life experienced by a husband and wife, as I understand it, in a Hawkesbury retirement home.

Speaker, I want to say as well—I want to remind my honourable colleague that sprinklers have been mandatory in all retirement homes built since 1997. I will say as well, Speaker, that at this time, we are working with the Ontario fire marshal's office. We are consulting with respect to the kinds of changes that we need to put in place. I want to assure my honourable colleague opposite that the question is not whether, Speaker, but how we move ahead to ensure that there are additional safety provisions.

Interjection: When?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: And when is another important issue, Speaker. We look forward to the advice that we're going to receive as a result of this consultation process, and we look forward to receiving that at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: For two years now, I've been calling on this government to pass my bill to require sprinklers in retirement homes. Jim Jessop, chair of the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs fire prevention committee, made this plea for action: "After witnessing senior citizens that are frail and were scared and were covered in smoke being carried down ladders at our fire" in Niagara Falls "in 2008 at the retirement home, it is just morally reprehensibly and criminally negligent for this not to be done."

Why won't this government listen to the experts, act now to save lives and require automatic sprinklers in all retirement homes?

1100

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, the purpose of the consultation process, which we are conducting in concert

with the Ontario fire marshal, is to get the very expert advice that we need to move ahead with this.

I'll remind my honourable colleague once again that as a result of retirement homes legislation, which I think we put into place a couple of years ago, Ontario, as I understand it, is the first province to regulate retirement homes. We've put in a number of new measures, some of which address fire safety. So we look forward to receiving that advice at the earliest possible opportunity.

I'll say something to my honourable colleague as well. I have a concern about the length of time devoted to this consultation process. I'm going to be speaking to the minister to see what we can do to accelerate that.

Again, Speaker, the issue is not whether but when we move ahead and in fact what kind of retirement homes we put those sprinklers in. I thank my honourable colleague for pushing this issue.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. This past Friday, I was very pleased to join the minister for an important affordable housing announcement in my riding of Ottawa Centre. It was fitting that the announcement took place at Beaver Barracks in my riding which, with 254 new affordable housing units, is not only Ottawa's newest affordable housing complex, but it is the largest project in the eastern region. The minister announced a \$144.9-million investment to create 1,282 new housing units across Ontario. Speaker, in addition to providing affordable housing units in our communities, it will create over 3,000 jobs.

I'm exceptionally proud of our government's commitment to safe and affordable housing in Ontario. By working together with other levels of government and the community, we are seeing real results.

Would the minister please tell us, Speaker, through you, what more our government is doing to work with the federal government to ensure that there is a strong commitment to affordable housing in Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm very happy to be able to talk about this project. As the member for Ottawa Centre knows—because he has advanced this and worked with the community to make this a reality—it supports so many diverse segments of the population: seniors, people with disabilities, single-parent families. Mr. Speaker, it's really a microcosm of communities from across the province.

I was very pleased to be joined by Diane Finley, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development. As you know, six months ago, Minister Finley and I signed a four-year agreement to invest almost half a billion dollars in communities across Ontario. That's the Investment in Affordable Housing program, which is part of our government's long-term affordable housing strategy. But the federal funding ends in 2014, Mr. Speaker, and one of the things that we're dealing with across the country is not knowing after 2014 where the money will

come from in order to be able to continue to work with the federal government and with municipalities to continue to build these projects.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: It is incumbent upon us to work with all levels of government to make certain that our communities are healthy and vibrant places that Ontarians can be proud of.

Speaker, places such as Beaver Barracks assist so many different and diverse groups in society with affordable housing. As we all know, a home is much more than a roof over our head. A safe and affordable home can open up so many other opportunities. However, we must acknowledge that often some of the most vulnerable in our society—for example, disadvantaged women—face challenges when it comes to taking that first step out of poverty.

Speaker, through you to the minister: What are we, as a government, doing to ensure that disadvantaged women in our province can benefit from the investments we are making in affordable housing?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member is absolutely right. Our government's priority has been to provide a range of affordable housing because there are people who often get left out of those equations.

Last week, I was at the official opening of the YWCA Elm Centre here in Toronto. That centre created 300 units for low-income women and their families, and 50 of those are dedicated to women of aboriginal descent.

Mr. Speaker, often when we speak about housing, we start talking about bricks and mortar and we move to, what are the supports that are necessary in order to keep people housed? Examples like Beaver Barracks and the Elm Centre are just that: They have the units, but they also the supports in place.

Mr. Speaker, we need to be able to continue to work with the federal government. We call on the federal government to continue to work with us to provide the kinds of housing that are necessary across the province for people from many, many different backgrounds.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health. Front-line staff at the Ministry of Health, and specifically at the emergency health services branch, have lost faith in their minister and in this government as they witness the intentional avoidance of the truth about why Dr. Chris Mazza had free rein to defraud the public and destroy our air ambulance system. They know, and they know that the minister knows, that shortly after the government signed the Mazza deal, the then associate deputy minister of the emergency health services branch wrote to the emergency health services branch to stand down on its oversight responsibilities of Ornge.

I ask the minister: Why was that letter sent from the Associate Deputy Minister of Health, actually asking the emergency health services branch not to oversee Ornge?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, what's important to me is that Ornge get back on track. We have new leadership in place, a new board, new administration.

I think it's important that we actually acknowledge EMS Week. Last week was EMS Week, and the front-line paramedics deserve a big thank you from this House for the work they do on behalf of Ontarians every single day.

It is vitally important to me that people can count on those emergency services, and that's why we have introduced legislation, on top of other steps we have taken, that we are very hopeful the member opposite will support. Bill 50 is a bill specifically designed to strengthen oversight and transparency at Ornge. I look forward to his stopping blocking passage of this bill and actually supporting it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Why is it that everyone at the Ministry of Health knows what's going on except the minister?

The reason that Dr. Mazza and his band of thieves were able to defraud Ontario taxpayers and compromise our air ambulance service is because, as the Auditor General said in his report, there was a lack of oversight on the part of the Ministry of Health. Now we know that that lack of oversight was intentional on the part of the Ministry of Health. It was not because of a faulty performance agreement or any of the other excuses that the minister has spun for the last number of months. It was because Hugh MacLeod, the then Associate Deputy Minister of Health, directed in writing the very department of the ministry that had those oversight responsibilities to stand down and leave Ornge alone.

I want to know this from the minister: Why has she kept this information secret? Why has she not disclosed that critical information, knowing that she knew about that letter? This minister—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I understand the member opposite has his job to do, but my job is to make sure that the people of this province get access to excellent health care, and that includes emergency care when they need that.

We have made big strides—the member opposite has actually described them as “aggressive steps”—to actually enhance oversight and transparency and improve patient safety at Ornge. Under the new performance agreement, there will be a new patient advocate. There will be a publicly posted complaints process. We're initiating annual public surveys on performance—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings is warned. Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We're improving the reporting of emergency dispatch information because we are now including cancelled calls, declined air and land ambulance calls. We're creating quality improvement committees so, just like our hospitals, we will be publicly reporting quality improvement plans.

We also have given ourselves, under the new performance agreement, the ability to have surprise audits, unannounced inspections. We're linking executive compensation to public performance. We're tying Ontario's funding to key performance indicators. We're giving the government control over Ornge's assets—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Internal notes provided to cabinet in 2004 show that experts within the government raised alarm bells about the new ambulance structure. Those alarm bells included: “the degree of control the ministry will retain in the new entity has still not been sufficiently addressed.”

Why did the government ignore the warning signs coming from within?

1110

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, right now there are hearings that are going on in public accounts to talk about some of the challenges that have been faced by Ornge, and I think this side of the House, the government, has admitted that we need to take steps to strengthen that. The minister acted promptly when she heard about the problems at Ornge in terms of administrative changes, in terms of a series of measures that have been taken.

The most important piece of the puzzle that's missing, however, is Bill 50, which has been held up by the opposition. Bill 50 is responding to the report of the Auditor General, an officer of this Legislature, and I certainly call on the honourable member, indeed all members of this House, to get behind Bill 50 and see it go through second reading and then committee so that it can address that missing piece of challenges that are being faced by that organization.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Back to the Premier: Civil servants shared with cabinet a long list of concerns that they had with Ornge's new structure; those included questions about how much control the ministry had in the new Ornge entity. In other words, red flags were being raised before Ornge began operating for-profit services and paying its executives huge salaries.

Why did the government ignore its own warning signs? Why did they look away?

Hon. John Milloy: The strong action that has been taken by the Minister of Health is a matter of public record: We have a new board and a new CEO at Ornge; she called in the forensic auditors, which unfortunately

uncovered some information which led to her calling in the OPP, the responsible thing to do; she has replaced the performance agreement and, as I said, introduced tough, new legislation.

But if the member wants to hold hearings on the floor of the House, we can talk about what happened in Oshawa and why members lobbied to have the airport go to Oshawa over Peterborough, despite the fact that senior Ornge officials were opposed to the deal. We can talk about Kelly Mitchell, who was paid tens of thousands of dollars to lobby the Progressive Conservative Party, to make sure that the Progressive Conservative Party was aware and, to quote from the document—I don't have it right in front of me but I remember—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. John Milloy: —to make sure that they knew that Ornge was in line with the Progressive Conservative Party manifesto they were putting forward in the election.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question this morning is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Last week, in conversation with farmers in Peterborough riding, questions were raised regarding the Grain Financial Protection Program. In December 2010, in response to industry concerns about grain farmers, your ministry approved a short-term amendment to allow deferred payments, which means payments outside the timelines specified in regulation. The amendment is in effect until July 1, 2012, so it will expire at the end of June this year.

I know that many farmers in Peterborough riding were supportive of this change of the regulation and are eager to see it continue. Speaker, through you, can the minister please update this House on the status of this amendment and whether your ministry has considered making the change permanent?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his question and take this opportunity to inform the House about changes to the Grain Financial Protection Program that will strengthen our agri-food business and, indeed, our economy.

As the member may well be aware, the program protects the financial interests of Ontario producers of grain corn, soybeans, canola and wheat who sell their crop to licensed dealers. It also protects owners who store grains and oilseeds with licensed elevator operators. I'm pleased to say we are, in fact, going to extend this protection, which is the essence of your question and the essence of standing up for our farmers in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Minister, thank you very much for that wonderful answer. It was very detailed and comprehensive.

I know that the farmers of Peterborough riding will be pleased to hear that the short-term amendment has been extended beyond June of this year. These changes will modernize the regulations to reflect current industry practices, provide clarity around compensation for deferred

payment arrangements and bring consistency to compensation rates across the industry, and will treat canola and soybean producers consistent with grain corn and wheat producers. It also authorizes payment on a sliding scale to producers entering into a deferred payment arrangement.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please inform the House of the stakeholder consultation that took place to develop these changes and some of the effects of these changes?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'd be delighted to do that. We had a deferred payment steering committee, which examined these issues, which included representatives from the Grain Farmers of Ontario, the Ontario Agri Business Association and the Grain Financial Protection Board. They were very, very involved in developing some of the options.

In fact, Henry Van Ankum, chair of the Grain Farmers of Ontario, has stated, "This has been a rewarding process to go through.... The government" needs to be "commended for how quickly" they have "resolved this issue."

The solution developed a more balanced approach, and it did so in direct consultation with our stakeholders. I think that speaks highly for our stakeholders and the move forward—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is for the Minister of Health. We know, as of today, that there were 154 documented incidents where no ambulances were available for the residents of Waterloo region. In fact, the Waterloo Region Record has called this an ambulance crisis, but I call this a crisis in the Minister of Health's leadership. Once again, the Minister of Health has proven she cannot manage her own ministry and has put the lives of people in Waterloo region at risk. Can the minister assure us that this problem does not rest in her ministry?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I thank the member opposite for the question, and I think it's important to acknowledge that land ambulance services is under the responsibility of the municipality. Having said that, we, at the Ministry of Health, do provide oversight. We also have made significant investments in ways to support ambulance services. Ambulance off-load nurses, for example, are being funded in our hospitals specifically to care for patients who have come in by ambulance so that those ambulances and paramedics can get back on the road caring for patients. We monitor response times and responses carefully, and we are always working with our municipal partners to improve ambulance services for the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: Again to the minister: Minister, you know full well that dispatch centres are under your control as well as land ambulances. Don't pass the buck.

Speaker, the same reports show that ambulances were unavailable up to 17 times a month since July 2010.

Patients and paramedics in Kitchener–Waterloo have been forced to wait over 10 hours in the back of ambulances due to your colossal failure of leadership. According to the Waterloo Region Record, the figures released show the ministry has not been able to keep emergency wards operating in a manner to provide the timely service that patients expect.

I ask the minister: Given that this was a situation more than two years ago, is she even aware that the situation has gotten worse?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It occurs to me that this actually is a spend question coming from the opposition; they want us to spend more on ambulances. I understand that, and I think the member's question actually demonstrates the importance of protecting spending on health care, and that includes the uploading of a significant portion of our land ambulance expenses.

Now, I also understand that the party opposite would have cancelled our plan to continue with the uploading of costs for land ambulance. I think the question demonstrates the sheer folly that that would have entailed.

We will continue to work with municipalities. We continue to monitor issues related to ambulance off-load times, response times and so on, and I look forward to working with the member opposite to ensure that his community, in addition, has access to appropriate emergency service.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. This morning, People for Education came out with a report on the state of education in Ontario. It shows half of Ontario high schools continue to charge fees for core courses. Your guidelines prohibit this. When will you actually ensure that students don't have to pay to go to school in Ontario?

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Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I welcome the report, referenced by my honourable colleague, from People for Education. That group has been around for some time now. They've become a very important part of the process that we rely on to take soundings outside of government as to what's happening inside our schools, so I really appreciate the effort that they continue to make.

I want to draw to my honourable colleague's attention the fact that, as well as some concerns raised in the report, which we always expect and listen to, there also was some celebration of some of the success that we have enjoyed when it comes to full-day kindergarten, for example; our higher graduation rates, smaller class sizes and increases in test scores.

School fundraising, I think, does remain an issue. We have taken some steps, but obviously we're going to have to do a little bit more to ensure that all schools are in fact paying attention to the strongest possible advice that we've given them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, the Premier has picked some points out of the People for Education report, but he has ignored the fact that People for Education say there has been a reduction in grants for arts and physical education and that the government failed to make sure that opportunity grants for the disadvantaged were actually spent on them. Half the schools are capping the number of students who can have access to special education supports.

Will the government act on the recommendations of the organization that they just praised and actually ensure that all students, regardless of family income, have access to the full range of education supports?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I believe, as my honourable colleague does as well, that the single most important thing we can do to guarantee a bright future for all our families is to ensure that all our children have access to the best possible publicly funded education. That's where it all starts.

That's why, since 2003, in the face of declining student enrolment, we've hired over 10,000 new teachers. We've hired over 10,000 education support workers. We have reduced class sizes. This September, I believe, there will be an additional 3,000 new teachers working in the Ontario education system.

That's why I'm counting on my honourable colleague to do everything that he can to ensure that we pass our budget at the earliest possible opportunity so we can freeze those corporate taxes and instead devote those kinds of resources into our schools, where they really matter.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. About one in seven people in Ontario have disabilities, and this number is anticipated to grow to one in five within 20 years, due to our aging population. By 2036, the number of seniors is projected to be more than double the 2009 number of 4.7 million; that's quite a bit. Personally, I know first-hand the challenges and opportunities that exist with accessibility in our province, and I speak with constituents in my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East all the time about this.

This is accessibility week, and it gives us an opportunity to rededicate ourselves to building an accessible province for people with all kinds of disabilities. My question is: How is this government addressing accessibility to truly make Ontario inclusive?

Hon. John Milloy: I do want to single out the member for her advocacy and leadership on this very important issue.

Mr. Speaker, each May we recognize National Access Awareness Week to honour achievements in building an Ontario that's accessible for all its residents, regardless of ability. I think all members of the Legislature, on all sides of the House, should be very pleased with the efforts that we made in 2005 when, unanimously, a bill that we had

brought forward, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, was passed by this House. This act establishes a framework under which standards are brought forward for people with disabilities to make our society more accessible. These are standards that come in over time through a series of benchmarks. I'm pleased to say we have developed and implemented four of the five standards that have been recognized.

I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank all those people involved in putting together these standards, the individuals who have been part of the standards development committees and my ministry's advisory council.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you to the minister. As the former chair of the Accessibility Standards Advisory Council for our province, I appreciate the advice we do receive from our local advisory councils throughout Ontario. These local advisory councils continue to inform me, as a past chair, and our government about accessibility needs in my community, and they provide feedback on how our government can help.

I understand, though, that time is needed for businesses to adapt new accessibility standards, and as they are developed, it will take some work. However, some businesses are still concerned about the costs of becoming fully accessible. Through you, Speaker, to the minister: What are the economic benefits for businesses that improve accessibility?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I think everyone who's involved on the business front and the non-profit front, everyone who's trying to make their place of business or their place more accessible, realizes that not only is it a matter of, call it corporate responsibility or doing the right thing, but it also makes good business sense. Study after study—one of the most famous ones was done by the world-renowned Martin Prosperity Institute—is indicating that improving accessibility is good for business. In fact, that particular study said that improving accessibility could bring Ontario up to \$1.6 billion in tourism dollars, and retail sales could grow by another \$10 billion.

As I say, Mr. Speaker, we have a large number of individuals in the province of Ontario who face challenges through disabilities. With an aging population, that number is set to grow. We have to make sure that we're the most accessible society, not simply because it's the right thing to do but because it makes good business sense.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is for the Premier. Premier, your idea for economic development involves more taxing, more spending and more consulting. Businesses today need immediate action to fix the job crisis that you created. Under your mismanagement, unemployment has been higher than the national average for more than 64 months. It seems that the only people who have a job in Ontario are those in government that create crafty schemes to actually spend more money.

Premier, rather than putting money into a slush fund earmarked for Liberal supporters and creating your so-called jobs panel, can you stand up today and tell residents of Kitchener–Waterloo how your inaction has resulted in a reported loss of 6,000 jobs at Research in Motion?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Economic Development and Innovation.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely delighted to stand up today and tell the people in Kitchener–Waterloo and the people throughout southwestern Ontario that the PC Party is standing in the way of jobs for their region. They're not moving forward with the southwestern Ontario development fund. That fund worked in eastern Ontario: 12,000 jobs created in eastern Ontario. We want to give people in southwestern Ontario access to those funds, access to their jobs. You, sir, and your party are standing in the way of jobs for Kitchener–Waterloo, standing in the way of jobs for Windsor, standing in the way of jobs for Sarnia, standing in the way of jobs throughout southwestern Ontario—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex will come to order.

Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: You know, Mr. Speaker—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Peterborough is warned.

Mr. Rob Leone: —what this minister doesn't understand is that we'll never be ashamed of standing up for 6,000 jobs in Waterloo region.

The first step to treating their addiction to economic underperformance is to actually admit that they have a problem. I just hope that the Premier and the government actually admit that, before there's yet another credit downgrade.

Premier, this is just not another layoff. This is big. This is a big deal for Canada and it's a big deal for Kitchener–Waterloo. RIM is one of the largest employers in Waterloo and now, as a result of doing business under your leadership, RIM is having to resort to layoffs just to stay afloat.

Minister, will you finally admit that you have mismanaged the economy and that you haven't the slightest idea of how to prevent more jobs from bleeding from Kitchener–Waterloo?

Hon. Brad Duguid: We on this side of the House are very proud of the things that RIM has accomplished over the years: the hundreds of millions of dollars that they've contributed to our economy, and the thousands of jobs. We remain confident in the future of that company.

I'll tell you something we're proud of, Mr. Speaker. Over the last five years, we have been having more business start-ups than ever before. In fact, the greater Toronto area, including Waterloo, is now number four in the world when it comes to business start-ups, behind New York, the Silicon Valley and London. That's because of the commitment we've made to innovation in this prov-

ince, a commitment that you oppose. That's because of the support we provide to places in Kitchener–Waterloo like Communitech, which is putting companies out every single day, creating jobs.

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We will create the next RIM in this province, but unfortunately it's without your support, because you're opposing—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question?

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, the auto insurance industry has reported huge profits while insurance premiums in Ontario are the highest in the country. For example, the Co-operators reported profits of \$150.3 million in 2011, a 100% increase from its previously reported \$72.7 million in 2010. The Co-operators provided an explanation for this. They said, "Significant improvements year over year can be attributed to favourable claims experience in the Ontario automobile insurance portfolio...."

Basically, the reforms that this government has made have made profits increase, but our premiums are still the highest in the country.

Minister, will your government finally acknowledge that the auto insurance industry is flawed and it's time to bring some fairness to the system here in Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'd like to read the member a letter from Andrew Murie, the CEO of MADD Canada, with reference to his bill respecting auto insurance. He says, "The bill will force responsible drivers to subsidize the insurance premiums of dangerous drivers."

Here's what MADD goes on to say to the NDP: "MADD Canada would strongly advocate that this bill be rejected. In our view, the bill sends all the wrong messages, punishes responsible drivers, rewards dangerous drivers, and will increase the risk to Ontario road users." That's Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

We ought to reject his bill and his approach. It's flawed. It's failed. He'll be hearing from a lot more people like that in the next few days at public hearings.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: While I have great respect for MADD as an organization that speaks about not drinking and driving, MADD is clearly wrong on this issue.

I have in my hand an article from a professor at the University of Waterloo, an actuarial scientist who refutes that claim and all the claims of IBC and will present that today at committee. In fact, the Auditor General and the Fraser Institute both indicate that insurance premiums in Ontario are the highest in the country.

This afternoon, the general government committee will begin a review of the entire auto insurance industry. It's our sincere hope that this government will work with us to inject some fairness into the system.

Let's be honest here. The auto insurance industry in Ontario is a complete mess. Will the minister commit his government to working with the NDP to bring some

fairness to Ontario, to bring the premiums down, to look at the fact that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh:—insurance is making so many profits and the people of Ontario are—

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I would urge the member's colleagues from northern Ontario to heed the advice of consumer advocates who suggest that insurance premiums in northern Ontario will go up 30% as a result of that member's bill.

Let's just review a little bit more. The member opposite wants drunk drivers and other reckless drivers to pay less insurance. The driving safety record as defined in his bill only includes actual accidents. If you get caught drunk driving but don't get into an accident, your premiums won't go up.

He also favours rich drivers over poorer drivers. He wants to not take into account the make, model and year of the car—very understandable, given the vehicles the member himself drives.

His approach is wrong. It will raise premiums in northern Ontario. Even Mothers Against Drunk Driving have rejected your party and your—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

Interjections.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member was kind of stepping on his own member's toes here, because—I will allow the first question. The member from Ajax–Pickering.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Thank you, Speaker. In this knowledge-based era, education and innovation will be the key to prosperity for Ontarians. That's why our government has positioned Ontario as a leader in post-secondary education in the competitive global economy. Our government's goal is to enable our students to succeed in this new economy so they have the ability to think critically, to express those thoughts clearly, and to adapt and apply knowledge to new areas and tasks. By adopting new technology, we can give students the experience they require to prepare them for their workplace.

What support are we providing to our universities and colleges through the recent Ontario budget so they can continue to build a strong knowledge economy workforce?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, a more insightful question has never been asked in this House before.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Don't insult your member. You shouldn't do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's not too late to name someone.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, it's sheer brilliance compared to anything that I've ever been asked by the member for Nipissing–Pembroke.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let's just—let us—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Yes, thank you. You said it for me.

Please.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I guess we've lost our sense of humour. It's only Monday.

We have actually increased operating grants, Mr. Speaker, to our colleges and universities by 77%. This is the largest investment since the Bill Davis government and the expansion of higher education. This has resulted in 210,000 additional seats, which means that there are 210,000 families out there, when they go down to the mailbox to get an answer that used to be a no, it's now a yes. For probably four times that many people, when you count the families, that's a life-changing experience. Thank you so much.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Newmarket—Aurora on a point of order.

Mr. Frank Klees: Yes, Speaker. I rise to correct my own record. In my question to the Minister of Health I referred to the individual who wrote the letter to the emergency health services branch to stand down on their oversight of Ornge as the associate deputy minister of the emergency health services branch. It was in fact the Associate Deputy Minister of Health who wrote that letter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That is a point of order, and the member does have a right to correct his record. I thank him for that.

This House does not have any deferred votes. It therefore stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1138 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to recognize Diane Urquhart and her husband, who are here, I believe, to listen to the proceedings today. I know her through her work in pension reform.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'd like to introduce the students from Biidaaban Kinomagegamik School from Sagamok First Nation, in the riding of Algoma-Manitoulin. They are touring the Legislature today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. John O'Toole: I rise today to call on the government to stop their mandatory WSIB increases, which are being forced on the Ontario small business community.

Recently, I had the opportunity to meet with many small construction companies and other independent businesses in my riding of Durham. I'm referring to people like my constituent Rudy Kraayvanger, president of Kraco Carpentry and Contracting, who are very concerned about the changes coming to their WSIB premium structure.

Workplace Safety and Insurance Board premiums are really a tax on jobs. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business estimates that changes to WSIB premiums "will cost the average small construction company \$11,000 a year...." This will force small business to "raise prices, cut jobs or even go out of business" entirely or go underground. I'm quoting from a December 30 Hamilton Spectator article.

This change amounts to a big tax hike on small businesses, who have to pay high premiums for workers who may not even set foot on the construction site at all—such people as office staff, managers and business partners who may never be on the site.

Speaker, it's worth mentioning again that WSIB's third quarter figures showed a massive unfunded liability of \$12.3 billion. Small businesses in my riding feel that they are the ones that are being forced to bail out the WSIB from this fiscal mess.

I encourage members to support Bill 87.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Paul Miller: I rise to highlight a serious issue facing our communities. Rising youth unemployment rates and the subsequent lack of summer jobs available to post-secondary students is an issue of great concern which must be addressed immediately.

Despite how bad the Premier's HST—on everything from keeping the lights on to filling up the gas tank—has been for families and for jobs, there's been slow and steady growth in some job markets in both this province and across the country, but not all workers of our respective communities are benefitting equally from this growth. In fact, youth are the only demographic group that has not benefitted.

As the summer job season gets under way, the jobless rate for young people between 15 and 24 years old is roughly 14%, which is almost double that of the total population. That is shocking and unacceptable.

We, as elected members of provincial Parliament, must do everything we can to tackle this issue. Youth are the future of this province, and we cannot simply leave them behind on our journey back to a prosperous Ontario.

I call upon all of my colleagues in the Legislature to make this issue a priority as we move forward. Let's get these kids to work.

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Mr. Joe Dickson: I rise today to deliver some great news for Ajax-Pickering and all of Durham which was

announced by Premier Dalton McGuinty during this past constituency week. Premier McGuinty, along with MPP Tracy MacCharles and I, met with reporters at the 407 site on Thursday for the announcement.

In my riding of Ajax-Pickering, the Highway 407 east extension has remained a top priority with our residents and, therefore, a top priority with our provincial government. Now motorists through Durham region will be glad to hear that construction on the 407 east from Brock Road to Harmony Road—and, I add, in Oshawa—is starting very soon.

With the construction from Pickering to Oshawa set to begin this fall, this three-year, \$1-billion project will create 900 direct construction jobs, and this, in turn, will boost the local economies within Durham region, including Ajax-Pickering. Over 20,000 spinoff jobs could be created from this investment in our local infrastructure.

This phase of the extension is scheduled to be completed by 2015, and the entire completed extension will stretch all the way to Highway 35/115 by 2020. Our Premier refers to this extension through Durham region as the people's highway, meaning that the ownership of the 407 east extension will be retained by the taxpayers. Rates will be set by the government, not a private corporation, as is the case with the existing 407, with a 100-year—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

YOUTH BOWLING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. Jim McDonell: Today, I wish to recognize and congratulate the winners of the Youth Bowling Canada National Championships, which took place May 5 to 7 in St. John's, Newfoundland. They're a team from my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, and I'm very proud of them.

The Olympia Bowl bantam girls of Cornwall, the youngest team at the nationals, brought back the gold trophy and are wonderful advocates for youth bowling in our area and beyond.

Congratulations to the members of the team: Alyssa MacGillivray, Sophia Dorie, Elysium Villeneuve, Shayla Lascelle and coach Marilyn Desrosiers.

They overcame great odds and finished ahead of 11 other teams at the provincial tournament in Hamilton, and ahead of eight teams in St. John's. They were cheered on by the other Ontario teams and won the trophy in a three-way tie-breaker with Alberta and BC. It truly was an amazing feat.

Speaker, we should all be impressed by both their achievement and their composure in victory. These are the Ontario leaders of tomorrow, and they give us excellent reason to see a bright future ahead for everyone in this province.

ASSISTANCE TO FLOOD VICTIMS

Ms. Sarah Campbell: This morning, the city of Thunder Bay and a number of municipalities and townships across northwestern Ontario declared a state of

emergency due to major flood damage that occurred overnight.

In less than 24 hours, hundreds of homes and businesses have sustained significant damage due to heavy rains that continue to hit the region. These rains are forecast to continue for the next few days, further complicating an already difficult situation. It goes without saying that our thoughts and prayers are with those who have been impacted by this situation.

At this time, I'm asking all members of this House to offer their support to the region. Damage to property and infrastructure, including roads and highways, is extensive. We in this House need to work together to ensure that the needs of these communities are met in the short and long term. I am asking members on all sides of this House to commit to working together to assist the members from Thunder Bay-Atikokan and Thunder Bay-Superior North to ensure that the communities affected are provided with the assistance they need to battle this situation now and in the weeks to come.

PHYSIOTHERAPISTS

Mr. David Zimmer: May is National Physiotherapy Month. I want to acknowledge the important work done by Ontario's 7,500 physiotherapists to improve the quality of life in Ontario.

Physiotherapists practise in most health care delivery venues, including hospitals, community health centres, long-term-care homes, home care and community clinics, and in the workplace. I suspect that many members of this Legislature and their families have, from time to time, made use of a physiotherapist at least once in their lives.

Physiotherapists contribute to the health care system in important ways. This was recognized and enhanced by a major expansion in the physiotherapy scope of practice and authorized acts, which were approved in 2010 by this Legislature.

As people venture out into their yards and the golf course, and out for recreational runs and walks, physiotherapists want to ensure that you can participate in these activities, that they will improve your personal mobility and that you will generally lead a healthier and injury-free life. So, a sincere thank you to Ontario's physiotherapists, and best wishes from this Legislature to the physiotherapy profession in the month of May.

STRATFORD SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: This evening is the opening night of the internationally renowned Stratford Shakespeare Festival. From an outdoor tent on the banks of the Avon River to today's three world-famous stages, the festival has impressed audiences since 1953.

I congratulate director Antoni Cimolino, artistic director Des McAnuff and every actor, artist, musician, employee, volunteer and contributor who help bring this artistic excellence to Stratford.

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Yesterday, Jane and I were pleased to attend the annual Stratford Shakespeare Festival garden party.

Earlier this year, I was privileged to meet with Antoni and other festival representatives. It was great to go behind the scenes to see first-hand what goes into a successful production.

Just recently, Frommer's—what many consider the top international travel guide—ranked Stratford as one of the top 10 Canadian destinations this summer. No doubt the festival was a major factor in that impressive achievement for the city.

I look forward to attending the Stratford Festival, just as I enjoyed attending the Drayton Festival for its opening night on May 15.

I want to wish the Stratford Shakespeare Festival a triumphant opening night and continued success in this, their 60th season.

EVENTS IN OTTAWA

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: It's a wonderful time of year for me, as the MPP for Ottawa Centre, where I and my community get to visit and enjoy all the beautiful, interesting, vibrant and exciting festivals that take place in our wonderful nation's capital.

While residents of Ottawa get to enjoy these activities year-round, we also welcome thousands upon thousands of Canadian and international tourists to our city.

These festivals not only make a tremendous cultural and entertainment contribution to our city's lifestyle, but also are a huge economic boost for local businesses and hospitality.

Most of these festivals rely and thrive on the hard work and generosity of volunteers. I would like to offer my appreciation to all those volunteers throughout our community who make these festivals world-class, safe and enjoyable for all of us.

Ottawa Festivals lists 60 festivals and community events. I wish I could name them all, but here are just a few highlights: the tulip festival, Bluesfest, the Ottawa International Jazz Festival, the dragon boat festival, HOPE Volleyball Summerfest, Capital Pride, Westfest, GreekFest, the Fringe Festival, Italian Week, the Ottawa Turkish Festival, the South Asian Festival, the Rideau Canal Festival, the children's festival, the chamber music festival, the Folk Festival, the Capital Vélo Fest for bicycles, Carnival of Cultures, Festival franco-ontarien, the Summer Solstice Aboriginal Arts Festival, the Music and Beyond arts festival—the list goes on and on.

I encourage all members to come visit Ottawa for this great summer festival season.

CANADA-WIDE SCIENCE FAIR

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to rise today to celebrate a national breakthrough by a group of young scientists from eastern Ontario.

In their best-ever showing at the Canada-Wide Science Fair, students from the Rideau-St. Lawrence

region went “five-for-five,” in the words of local science fair organizer Rod Charlton. All five local students who earned their way to the national competition in Charlotte-town earlier this month came home with medals. It's an amazing achievement, considering they were up against 500 of the brightest grades seven to 12 student scientists from across the country.

The record-setting medal haul was headlined by the junior gold medal earned by 12-year-old Christian Au of Brockville, a student at St. Lawrence Academy. Au's project was titled “BBs: Ballistics Gone Bio” and examined biodegradable BBs. He obviously hit the mark with the judges and earned a \$1,500 prize to go with the gold medal.

Brockville Collegiate Institute's dynamic duo of Nathan Heuvel and Adrian Au won an intermediate bronze for their project called “Exhaustive Energy.” Adrian is Christian's big brother, so I imagine there was a big celebration in the Au household.

The other winning partnership was Smiths Falls District Collegiate Institute students Robert Fournier and Logan Burns, who won a senior bronze medal for their project “Distraction Factor.”

Speaker, I'm so proud to honour these five outstanding students, who I'm certain are just getting started doing great things with their inquisitive minds.

It's my hope news of their success will see more local educators encouraging students to follow in their footsteps and get involved in the annual Rideau St. Lawrence Science Fair.

PETITIONS

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents of the riding of Durham which reads as follows:

“Whereas the government of Ontario and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) are forcing a mandatory premium increase on small business in the province of Ontario, specifically small construction companies and independent operators;

“Whereas the Ministry of Labour has a responsibility to protect workers and ensure workplaces are safe, but should do so in a way that respects a small business's ability to be profitable and successful;

“Whereas the government of Ontario has, unilaterally and without consultation, forced a mandatory premium increase on small businesses which will cost the average company an additional \$11,000 annually;

“Whereas this single source of workplace insurance has become an expensive monopoly, forcing many small business operators to lay off staff or close their doors permanently;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the government of Ontario to cancel its current plan to increase and make

mandatory WSIB premiums for employees, such as office staff, managers and business partners, who are not directly involved on construction sites" and may not be on the work site ever in their work time."

I'm pleased to sign, endorse this and present it to one of the new pages, Sam.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission provides services which are vital to the north's economy; and

"Whereas it is a lifeline for the residents of northern communities who have no other source of public transportation; and

"Whereas the ONTC could be a vital link to the Ring of Fire;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the planned cancellation of the Northlander and the sale of the rest of the assets of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission be halted immediately."

I fully agree, and I would like to hand it down to Alexander.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the horse racing industry employs approximately 60,000 people, creates \$1.5 billion in wages and \$2 billion in recurring expenditures annually; and

"Whereas the partnership that was created between government and the horse breeding and racing industry has been a model arrangement and is heralded throughout North America, with 75% of revenues going to the provincial government to fund important programs like health care and education, 5% to the municipalities and only 20% goes back to the horse business; and

"Whereas the horse business is a significant source of revenue for the farming community and rural municipalities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Finance continue the revenue-sharing partnership with the horse racing industry for the benefit of Ontario's agricultural and rural economies."

I support this petition and will send it with page Kyrá to the clerks' desk.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Nickel Belt.

"Whereas the Ontario government" has made PET scanning "a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients...; and

"Whereas" since "October 2009, insured PET scans" are performed "in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with" Health Sciences North, "its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

They "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through" Health Sciences North, "thereby serving and providing equitable access to the" residents of the northeast.

I fully support this petition, Mr. Speaker, will affix my name to it and ask page Dana to bring it to the Clerk.

DISABILITY INSURANCE

Mr. Jim McDonell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Nortel disabled former employees meet the literal meaning of the defined term 'consumer' in the Ontario Consumer Protection Act; and

"Whereas disability insurance services supplied by Nortel and Sun Life met with the literal meaning of the defined term 'consumer transaction' in the Ontario Consumer Protection Act; and

"Whereas terms and conditions of employment or disputes arising in the context of workplace relationships are not on the long list of exceptions for which the Ontario Consumer Protection Act and regulations do not apply; and

"Whereas disability insurance services supplied by Nortel and Sun Life are within the spirit and the object of the Ontario Consumer Protection Act, as expressed by the Hansard transcript of the Ontario Legislature and the Ontario Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs; and

"Whereas the Ontario government supported the March 30, 2010, Nortel settlement agreement, whose legal release prevents the Nortel disabled from undertaking their own civil litigations to remedy wrongdoings in respect to Nortel's disability insurance and health and welfare trust, and whose court approval relied on a single Nortel disabled court-appointed representative agreeing to the settlements without having the informed consent of Nortel's disabled group; and

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"Whereas the federal Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act enables the priority payment of a court restitution order prepared by the regulatory body when a viable compromise of the debtor is unaffected and the public interest is served—for example, the recent court approval of the non-bank ABCP regulatory settlements to the paid owners; and

"Whereas the Nortel disabled former employees have had an at least 65% cut in their disability income when the Nortel CCAA proceedings to date and, on March 31, 2012, the Ottawa Citizen defined these court proceedings

as 'a glaring example of everything that is wrong with the justice system';

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To instruct the minister of consumer affairs to use her powers under the Ontario Consumer Protection Act to enforce its provisions for unfair business practices and false and misleading and deceptive representations and to seek a court restitution order for the damages to the Nortel disabled former employees caused by these offences."

I will be handing this off to page Stavroula.

TOURISM

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I have a petition which reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas tourism is a vital contributor to the economy of northwestern Ontario, bringing hundreds of millions of dollars into the province's economy from other provinces and the United States, unlike other regions in the province whose target demographic is people who already reside in Ontario;

"Whereas northwestern Ontario's tourist economy has been under attack by government policies such as the cancellation of the spring bear hunt, the harmonized sales tax (HST), the strong Canadian dollar and difficulties passing through the Canada/United States border; and

"Whereas studies have shown that tourism in the northwest nets significantly more money per stay than other regions of the province, in part due to visitors frequenting historical sites, parks and roadside attractions that they learn about through travel information centres;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To keep the travel information centres in Fort Frances, Kenora and Rainy River open permanently to ensure that northwestern Ontario maximizes the benefit of our tourist economy."

I support this petition and will give this to page Tameem to deliver.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is in serious need of modernization;

"Whereas the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) is not in harmony with all the following acts, regulations, guidelines and codes: the Occupational Health and Safety Act of Ontario, the radiation protection regulations of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, the safety codes of Health Canada and the radiation protection guidelines of the International Commission on Radiological Protection;

"Whereas dental hygienists need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their clients with safe and

convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by Dr. Reza Moridi, the member from Richmond Hill, that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations, make recommendations on how to modernize this act, and bring it to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I fully agree with this petition, sign them and pass them to page Daxime.

MARKDALE HOSPITAL

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Grey Bruce Health Services' Markdale hospital is the only health care facility between Owen Sound and Orangeville on the Highway 10 corridor;

"Whereas the community of Markdale rallied to raise \$13 million on the promise they would get a new state-of-the-art hospital in Markdale;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care announce as soon as possible its intended construction date for the new Markdale hospital and ensure that the care needs of the patients and families of our community are met in a timely manner."

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it with page Alexander.

REGULATION OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to submit this petition on behalf of my dentist, Dr. Denny Jezdic, from Belle River.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas, as currently legislated by the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, a dentist can be charged with sexual abuse for treating their spouse;

"Whereas the equation cannot be made between placing a filling, scaling a patient's teeth or reading a patient's X-rays and sexual abuse;

"Whereas dentists support zero tolerance as it relates to sexual abuse;

"Whereas, in rural and northern underserved areas of Ontario, dentists prevented from treating their spouses may create a barrier to access;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly ... as follows:

"That the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care immediately exempt dentists from the sexual abuse

provisions under the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, to allow dentists to provide dental treatment to their spouses; and

"That the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return the authority to review and exercise discretion on a case-by-case basis any complaints involving spousal treatment to the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario."

I agree with the petition, affix my name to it and submit it with our new page Dana.

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Helena Jacek: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiation in medical diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas the main legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection (HARP) Act, dates from the 1980s; and

"Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the HARP Act have kept pace with the advancements in imaging examinations as well as diagnostic and therapeutic procedures; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario are deemed by subsection 6(2)8 of the HARP Act to be qualified to 'operate an X-ray machine for the irradiation of a human being'; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in Ontario need to be designated as radiation protection officers and to undertake X-rays of the orofacial complex on their own authority in order to fully function within their scope of practice; and

"Whereas dental hygienists fully functioning within their scope of practice provide safe, effective, accessible and affordable comprehensive preventive oral health care as well as choice of provider to the public of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I agree with this petition, will sign it and send it to the table with page Katie.

MALE BREAST CANCER

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here signed by a great many of my constituents.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas, each year, an estimated 45 men will die of male breast cancer in Canada, a number that is expected only to increase; and

"Whereas breast cancer is widely believed to be a disease specific to women, and due to a general lack of awareness that men can also develop breast cancer, men are typically diagnosed at a late stage; and

"Whereas promoting awareness and education about male breast cancer is crucial to improving the health and well-being of men throughout Ontario, facilitating earlier detection, improving the prognosis of men who have been diagnosed with the disease and ultimately preventing further loss of life; and

"Whereas, in remembrance of the many men who have lost their lives or are fighting for their lives,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the third week of October be designated as Male Breast Cancer Awareness Week in Ontario."

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to present this petition on behalf of my constituents.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It gives me great pleasure to present this petition here today. I have 1,000 petitions. I'll be presenting 1,000 a day until the end of the session. The petition reads as follows:

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Auto insurance reform needed: Protect consumers.

"Whereas auto insurance rates are too high in the province of Ontario and continue to increase;

"Whereas families across the greater Toronto area (GTA) are facing unfair insurance premiums that have more to do with where they live than their accident history or driving ability; and

"Whereas insurance premiums across the GTA differ by as much as 150% for drivers with the same driving record;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Legislative Assembly undertake auto insurance reform that protects consumers, ensuring that premiums are based on a fair assessment of a driver's known ability and history, rather than unfairly targeting drivers on the basis of where they live."

I fully agree with this petition, will affix my signature, and present it to page Sam.

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ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONG ACTION FOR ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR UNE ACTION ÉNERGIQUE POUR L'ONTARIO (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 17, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / *Projet de loi 55, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate on Bill 55? I recognize the member for Willowdale.

Mr. David Zimmer: Thank you, Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to this bill. Let me say, before I get started, that there are two premises to my remarks. The first premise in the remarks I want to offer is that passing this budget bill is the most important thing that we as legislators here at Queen's Park in Ontario can do to ensure the revival, the strengthening and the comeback of our economy here in Ontario. That's what I hear in my riding, in Willowdale, and that's what I hear when I travel in other parts of the province. People want to get our economy back on a strong footing. The first step in getting the economy on a strong footing is to get this budget bill passed, so that we all know what the ground rules are for the next year, and no matter what our position is here in Ontario—whether we're working persons, whether we're professional persons, whether we're legislators, whether we're homemakers, whether we're teachers, whether we're business persons—we can all get started to rebuild the economy.

The second premise of my remarks is that, in rebuilding our economy and addressing the issues raised in the budget, everybody in Ontario has a role to play, but an especially important role is the role played by members of this Legislature. And an especially important role for all members of this Legislature, particularly members of the opposition, is to stop this business of grinding the work of this Legislature to a halt, whether it's bell-ringing in this chamber, whether it's shutting down committees.

What the members of the opposition, particularly the PC opposition, are doing is preventing this budget bill from going through, and to the extent they are preventing it from going through, they're just holding back the start of our recovery, which is outlined in this budget. I urge everybody to do their bit. I especially urge the members of the opposition, I especially urge the PC members to get off your proverbials and work with us on Bill 55, so that we can start to rebuild Ontario's economy.

I want to speak to five things in Bill 55 that I think are critical. First, it's important that we balance the budget to make the economy stronger and that we create jobs, because a balanced budget gives everyone in Ontario—workers, bankers, teachers, doctors, everybody—the confidence that our economy is going to work. Bill 55, our budget, is designed to meet that need. It's designed to balance the budget in five years, by budget year 2017-18. At the same time we are balancing the budget, we're going to maintain a low rate of growth in spending and we are going to beat our budget deficit targets as laid out in the 2010-11 budget. By doing that, and by creating that stability, that in turn will create confidence in the business sector, that in turn will create confidence in the

investment sector, and that in turn will create confidence among the people working in our economy.

The second thing I want to highlight in our budget—this is very, very important; this leads to the stability and to the balanced budget targets. For every additional \$1 in proposed new revenue measures—for every \$1 in proposed new revenue measures—there are \$4 in savings and cost-containment measures.

When we take that \$1 in proposed revenue and balance that against the \$4 in savings and containment costs, that's a significant step along the way to balancing the budget.

Bill 55 of the budget also includes \$17.7 billion of savings and further actions to contain cost increases. There's also \$4.4 billion in revenue-raising measures—that's the \$1 in the \$4 that I talked about. But more importantly, at the same time that we're leading with those financial initiatives, we are going to take strong, strong measures to transform our public services. The way public services are delivered in Ontario is a major, major piece of the budget. It's a major, major piece of the cost structure here in Ontario.

What are we doing to manage costs and to transform our public service? Let me just walk you through a few of the things.

We're going to manage current and future compensation costs in the public sector. We're proposing legislation to make arbitration more transparent, accountable and efficient.

That's something that we've heard about from all sectors of our economy, particularly in the MUSH sector—the municipalities, universities, schools and hospitals. They are crying out for reform of the arbitration system. They want it more transparent and accountable and efficient, and why do they want that? They want that so they can work with us in addressing their cost issues.

We are consulting with stakeholders on a legislative framework that would make public service pensions more affordable for taxpayers and more sustainable—that's the other part of it—for plan members.

As members of the Legislature, we are doing our bit. We are extending the MPP pay freeze for another two years, for a total of five years. It has been three years since the members of this Legislature have taken a pay raise, and we're going to extend that for two. That's a way that members ourselves, all of those who sit in these desks and these chairs in this room, can personally exercise some leadership and a sense of commitment to containing our cost structures here in Ontario.

The Ontario drug benefit plan, the ODB, is going to be reformed so that 5% of senior ODB recipients with the highest incomes pay more for their prescription costs. That's fair. All we're asking is that those people, high-income seniors, contribute a little more to our health care program and our cost structures. There are 1.9 million seniors living in Ontario, and this additional cost on the ODB change will only affect about 75,000 of the highest-earning seniors.

We propose to freeze the corporate income tax—
Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Please take your seat just for one moment. I would ask all members of the House to quieten down a bit so that I can hear the member for Willowdale.

Member for Willowdale.

Mr. David Zimmer: Thank you. We are proposing to freeze corporate income tax and business education tax reductions. That, again, will provide us with some additional funds to meet our balanced budget targets.

We are going to transform the way we deliver support to business, and this is important because one role the government does have is supporting our private sector business entities so they can prosper and create the jobs that we want our people in Ontario to have. What we're doing there is, we're going to create the jobs and prosperity fund. It will be under a panel of leadership of distinguished Ontarians who understand business, who understand the economy and who understand the social needs of our province, its hospitals and schools. They're going to take a broad overview and give advice on structuring the economy so that Ontario can remain prosperous, can become more prosperous, that we can hang on to our jobs and that we can create more jobs.

We are going to continue to have the world's best-educated workforce because, ultimately, down the road, the higher the levels of education of our workers, our professional people, our engineers, our doctors, our business persons—they're the people who are going to create and manage the social structures and our economy. So we're starting right at the base level. We are maintaining full-day kindergarten. We're going to have smaller class sizes. When we move up the scale to colleges and universities, we've got a 30% Ontario tuition grant for families, and we're integrating various training programs. It's all of a piece to provide our economy with the infrastructure that it needs to grow, to create jobs so that people are paying taxes, so that we can deal with our deficit.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to respond. I think when the member first started speaking he did leave some suspicion about what he would be responding to, but this motion by the government with respect to Bill 55, the budget—we've made it very clear, as you know, this budget does nothing to resolve the issues facing the province of Ontario. We have an escalating problem of the economy and jobs. This budget does nothing about the job function. In fact, as you would know, Mr. Speaker, it increases spending in a time when even Don Drummond was recommending restraint. So I put to you that this motion that we're debating today is a clear admission by the McGuinty government—they just don't get it.

Right now, when I look at businesses in my community—and not just Research in Motion, the most recent victim of the McGuinty policies—all you've done is increase spending and increase the risk to oppor-

tunities, especially for young people in Ontario, the ones graduating from college and university. Where are the jobs? They're graduating with the highest debt load in history, and the opportunities are bleak at best. It's absolutely frightening. I'm going to a commencement, a graduation exercise—I believe it's this weekend on my schedule—and we're asked to bring greetings. What greetings can I bring to the youth who are graduating into this future of Ontario where we have chronic unemployment, we have a structural deficit, and this member gets up there and reads the trite that's been handed to him by the finance minister that has taken us close to the cliff?

I can't possibly support what's being said here, and I'd recommend people even on the government side take a close look. Hold your breath, close your nose, close your eyes and vote against Bill 55.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I listened to the member from Willowdale and his presentation, and he certainly focused on what he feels are the most important issues to the Liberal Party and their agenda, but what he didn't talk about was the budget—it was no jobs. They claim that they've created 140,000 jobs, but with all due respect, Speaker, most of those jobs are either part-time or minimum wage. So I really wouldn't be bragging. I remember when this all started, they said they were going to create 600,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector, 50,000 green venture jobs. They are nowhere near it. They've retracted about six times on the 600,000; I think we're down to about 40,000 now. And the 50,000 jobs in green venture? It's non-existent, a pathetic number; I think it's less than 1,000 jobs. So all these forecasts that they make on how things are going to turn around sound great—it's a great thing for the media; it's a great thing, they think, to boost their popularity—however, it's not realistic.

When you're going to create jobs in Ontario, you don't attack the horse racing industry, which has between about 60,000 full-time jobs and probably another 100,000 support jobs in small business—harnesses, veterinarians, suppliers, grain, all kinds of other secondary industries that are affected. So I think it's probably in the neighbourhood of 150,000 jobs they've lost there by attacking the horse racing industry and calling it a subsidy, when actually it was a deal that was cut with the horse racing industry. It was not a subsidy. They get 75% of the revenue and they don't have to do anything to get it. Why would you cut your throat and take all that revenue out of the people of Ontario for their hospitals and all the other things that they brag about wanting to fix? It just doesn't make sense.

This budget is terrible, lousy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to be able to comment on the remarks of my colleague from Willowdale. I totally agree with the member from Willowdale when he says that the single most important thing that we can do right now to grow our economy, to recover fully

from the recession, is to balance the budget, and in order to do that, we need to pass this budget bill.

What I have found very interesting over the last week, when I, like you, have been in my constituency, is that as I talk to people in my community, they assume that the budget issue has been resolved. People out there think that when we pass the budget motion, we all have an agreement on how the budget was going to unfold and that it's all done. They're very surprised when I tell them that, no, there's a budget bill which actually implements that budget motion and needs to be passed, and the opposition—both parties—are blocking the passage of the budget bill.

We need to get on with agreeing on the timing of how we are going to get this budget passed. Then we can do the good things that need to be done. We can make sure that we return to balance by 2017. We can implement the tax measures we've all agreed on, we can introduce the new revenue measures, and we can make sure that we get Ontario back in top-notch economic health.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I rise today to talk on Bill 55, the budget bill. I guess I'm a little amazed that there's anybody in this House that could support the bill that's before us.

I listened to the press gallery report last week, with the Minister of Finance and the House leader, with all their rumblings and talk about how we're blocking this bill. But really, when you look at it—and we've been very clear in this—we're willing to co-operate, maybe not in the passage of this bill, but with the running of this Parliament, if they'd simply follow their agreement to put together the select committee on Ornge, a very basic commitment they made to the House, and we took them at their word for that. I guess we shouldn't have done that—it was a mistake—because now, after the House voted on it, they've reneged on that decision.

You look at this motion, and it is an issue for us. It doesn't supply any jobs. It continues to increase spending at a time when their own consultant talked about the need to get the deficit to zero. This budget is between \$2 billion and \$3 billion more than it was last year. So I don't know how they stand here and say that they've actually cut spending.

We're looking at areas where they've affected the horse racing industry, which actually contributed \$1.1 billion to this government, and now they're losing that, with the idea that they're going to open up casinos in other areas when we're already closing them down because those stand-alone casinos aren't making money. Times are not good in Ontario, and people don't have the money they used to have. We're gambling on the people who actually go out and gamble and are willing to give away this money that they used to have available to them for discretionary spending but no longer have. So we cannot support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I return to the member for Willowdale.

Mr. David Zimmer: I come back to my point that the most important thing we can do to get moving in our economy is get this budget bill passed.

I just want to go over the PC record on that. I was in this chamber. The Minister of Finance introduced the budget bill at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. It's a thick document; there's a lot of stuff in there. The leader of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, literally within the hour—so he couldn't possibly have sat down and reflected on that budget in any thoughtful, mature, respectful way—within the hour, just off the top of his head, without giving it a thought, committed himself and his party to voting against it. Now, is that responsible? Is that a responsible exercise of the responsibilities of the opposition? I remind the opposition that the full name of the opposition is Her Majesty's loyal opposition. They just rejected that—

1350

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the opposition members to come to order, please, so that I can hear the member for Willowdale make his summation.

I'll give you some extra time, member for Willowdale.

Mr. David Zimmer: They just rejected that bill out of hand, without even having the courtesy—or exercising their responsibility—to at least read it through and think about it carefully.

Not only did they not do that, but since that budget bill was introduced by the Minister of Finance, there's been no effective movement or debate. They haven't come to us and said, "Well, here, we've got some ideas on the budget. We don't care for that, but we like this." Sit down and talk to us about it. They won't even talk about the budget. They won't negotiate the budget. It's just flat-out, "No, no, no," for the sake of being obstructionist.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to have the opportunity to speak this afternoon on the budget bill, Bill 55.

I should just respond to the member from Willowdale to say that, of course, in the budget lock-up, there's a team of experts locked up for the day looking at the budget in detail, but it didn't take long to see that the government's plans were to go from a \$15.3-billion deficit in the current year to a \$15.-2 billion deficit in the financial year we are now in, and that is simply unacceptable.

The government has dug this province into a very deep economic hole, with years of excessive spending, and this budget makes clear that they have no intention of making the decisions necessary to pull us out. As I mentioned, the \$15.3-billion deficit makes it more difficult to provide services, it makes the province an unappealing place to invest, it hurts our credit rating—we've seen downgrades—and it drives up our interest payments and puts prosperity for future generations at risk.

For all the government's rhetoric and hoopla, this budget reduces a \$15.3-billion deficit to a \$15.2-billion deficit. The budget talks about the importance of taking strong action to address difficult financial realities brought about by the recession, yet there is no strong action evident in this bill. We would be running virtually the same deficit this year as we did last year. That is not strong action.

We have seen the report from the government's own economic expert, Mr. Drummond, that I think was more a delay tactic than anything else. He came out with an in-depth report, with over 300 recommendations. He also, at the beginning of it, said, "This is the real financial situation in Ontario." The status quo is, if government spending continues the way it has been the past number of years, we're not looking at a balanced budget in 2017-18. We're looking at a \$30-billion deficit and we're looking—the other really scary number—at \$411 billion of total debt.

In your budget document, you mention that the province spends more money on interest each year than on colleges and universities. That scary statistic will only get worse under this budget and this government. Lower credit ratings and ballooning debts will see the province's interest rates continue to skyrocket. Those are hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars spent each year on interest instead of on providing services that the province very much needs. The current number is about \$10.6 billion, at, I might add, historically low interest rates.

Just as an aside, I just spent the week visiting our daughter Renee in England and Ireland. If you're in Ireland, you can't help but notice signs all over the streets with either a "no" vote for a referendum—vote against the referendum on their financial agreement—or "yes." It's a huge topic of discussion there: that essentially the government's debt has created such a problem, they are now having to agree to a contract about how high a deficit they will be able to run in future. So, on May 31, they will have a big vote on that in Ireland.

The other scary statistic coming out of Ireland that I heard about was that 10% of households are in 90 days of arrears on their mortgage payments—10%. Well, that's where this province is heading if we keep on piling up a \$15.2-billion, \$15.3-billion deficit. Those are huge numbers, and the government just doesn't get it. They don't understand. You need to go and visit some other places. You see all the news about Spain and the banks there. You hear a lot about Greece. This government is willing to just keep on going and spending and doesn't realize the road we're on.

The government's budget also leaves people in northern Ontario feeling forgotten and exploited. Mr. Speaker, I visited Kenora in April to attend the North-western Ontario Municipal Association conference. Also, I was in North Bay a few weeks after that for the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities annual general meeting. These are important meetings where all the northern municipal officials get together to talk about important issues and concerns that they have, and they

also use it as an opportunity—there are bear-pit sessions to question members of the government. You would have thought, these being the two biggest northern conferences of the year, that the Minister of Northern Development and Mines might attend them, but he missed both—particularly when at the FNOM one they were flying the flags at half-mast because of decisions of the government, as noted in the budget bills, to do with the divestment of the Ontario Northland transportation corporation, which is of course vital transportation infrastructure in northeastern Ontario. The Minister of Municipal Affairs, to give her credit, attended both conferences, but the person that the municipalities and those attending really wanted to talk to was the minister responsible for the north, the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Mr. Speaker, the member from Nipissing and I will be touring our northern communities in June to talk to affected stakeholders and those that depend on rail transportation in the north, to get input from them on what needs to be done to provide that essential infrastructure going forward, because the government made this decision without any consultation and without any notice, really, to these businesses.

We've already seen businesses leaving northern Ontario because of high energy rates. We've seen Xstrata move 700 jobs from Timmins to Quebec because of high energy rates. I know a lot of the companies say even a 1% increase in transportation costs can be a deal breaker and make the difference between having a viable project or not having a viable project.

Again to do with the north, a few weeks ago the minister made an announcement with great fanfare about a chromite processing facility in Sudbury. It didn't take long for the varnish to come off his flashy press release to reveal that, once again, northern policy from this government raises more questions than it actually answers. The minister's press release with his mug shot on it made it sound like there was a mine opening. The title: "Thousands of Jobs Coming to Northern Ontario." You read the actual one from Cliffs and basically it's about going from a pre-feasibility to a feasibility study of a prospective smelter—so two very different announcements.

I've got a few more pages that I'd love to get through in my speech, but we, as the opposition, have been ringing the bells, and I want to just take a moment to explain why we've been doing that. The Legislature did pass, with the support of the Legislature, a motion to have a select committee look into the air ambulance situation at Ornge. The health minister, in the House, did say that she would honour the will of the Legislature, and since, the opposition has put forward a compromise to expand the terms of reference of the public accounts committee to essentially make it the select committee. I would say that the public accounts committee has been doing very good work and all members of the committee from all parties have been doing a good job on that committee. But the health minister did express that she would listen to the will of the House, and the will of the

House was expressed through a motion voted on here. That's why the opposition has been ringing bells. It's one of the few tools the opposition can use to try to get the government's attention. So, Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Miller has moved the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1400 to 1430.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those in favour of the motion will please rise and be counted by the table staff.

Take your seats.

All those opposed to the motion will please rise and be counted by the table staff.

Take your seats.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 31; the nays are 46.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

The member for Parry Sound-Muskoka still has some time on the clock, and I'll return to the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: When we left off, I was explaining the very rational reason why we've been ringing the bells; that is, the Minister of Health, in the House, under questioning in question period, did state that she would respect the will of the House. Then there was a vote in the House to establish a select committee to look into the Ornge affair. That passed in this House, so the will of the House has been expressed.

Then the opposition, very rationally, offered to expand the mandate of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to have it essentially become the select committee and, as I stated, the public accounts committee has been doing an excellent job—weekly, there are new revelations. But so far, the government has not responded and the health minister has not honoured her commitment. So, because of that, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Miller, Parry Sound-Muskoka, has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1433 to 1503.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing while you're counted by the table staff.

You may take your seats.

All those opposed to the motion will please rise now and be counted by the table staff.

You may take your seats.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 29; the nays are 43.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: It was interesting to listen to the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka as he spoke about the bill. He started off, though, with a premise that I don't think is necessarily true, and that is that the Conservative Party had an option, before the budget was released—sitting in quarantine, as I like to call it, more than anything else—for a couple of hours to look through what was contained within the body of the budget and the budget bill, and came to a conclusion. I don't have any problem that they came to a conclusion that was radically different to our own or to that of the government. That's what happens in a full-fledged democracy like ours. But what I did find difficult in what he had to say was that he knew everything he needed to know in that short period of time.

Just this morning, there was a news conference here in the Legislature talking about schedule 28 of Bill 55. Although I had read the bill, I must admit that this particular schedule had escaped my notice—the enormous import of it. What happened this morning was that a lawyer came in from a very prestigious law firm—the same lawyer who had challenged the Conservative government's sale of Hydro One all those many years ago, the same lawyer with impeccable credentials—who informed us about section 28 of Bill 55 and what it means. I think the Liberal government, particularly the backbenchers, had better take another look at what that actually says. It gives the government permission to set up a dummy corporation to sell off the entire government—and that's pretty much it—nor does anything ever have to come to the Legislature again, nor does anything ever have to be debated in this place again. It will simply be a government prerogative to sell off when and to whom they want, whether it be Canadian or even American or worldwide interests. That's something that needs some study, and that's something that we have to continue to look at.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I had a chance to listen to the remarks from the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka. I appreciate what he's trying to say, but, again, the underlying fact is that the Conservatives, right from the start, said they were not going to support the budget.

The budget is a very, very large document and it has addendums to it as well. I have a copy of the budget here, at least the main part of the budget which does not include the addendums, and it's over 300 pages long. On the day of the budget, when you have a chance to go to the budget lock-up, you can get briefed on the budget. I think that the Leader of the Opposition and the finance

critic did get briefed during the budget lock-up, and later on, they came out and immediately said, "No, we're not going to vote for this budget," without looking at the finer details of the budget.

When you dig into it—even if you don't dig into it—you find that the theme of the budget is to try to balance the budget. We're trying to do that fairly quickly within the next few years. I think you need to read the document properly to understand why we're trying to balance the budget as soon as possible.

The main themes are to grow the economy, create jobs and keep education and health care strong. It's a difficult task to do but an important one to do. I think that when we try to balance the budget, there are a number of factors at play.

I don't think in one day of budget lock-up and so many hours of budget lock-up—it's not the entire day—to come back at 4 o'clock for the finance minister to read the budget—I don't think that's enough time to really absorb what's inside the budget and suddenly decide, "No, we're not going to vote for it," and take a hard line, "No, no, no." At least have a chance to look at the budget. I think it's the wrong attitude not to look at it. For that reason, I think they need to be corrected and hopefully do a better job when they read documents.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to stand and speak to my colleague Norm Miller from Parry Sound-Muskoka—both Norm and his dad, Frank, before him were long-established tenants in this House, very responsible members with a history of sound fiscal responsibility.

1510 He brought up a lot of practical comments in his few minutes of delivery. He shared the fact that we were in lock-up. We had experts in lock-up who did review the budget and, for many reasons, sound, principled reasons, we chose not to support this budget.

He suggested that this \$15.3-billion deficit is heading towards \$30 billion if we don't take strong action. We need to do that, not just a bunch of rhetoric.

He suggested there was a lack of willingness, that perhaps the ability to make the decisions that are necessary is not within the conviction of the Liberals across the floor, and I agree with that. They want to tamper around the edges. They want to talk about some frill things, but they really aren't making significant action that's going to turn this province around.

He talked about the two credit rating downgrades that we've experienced. This is going to add—interest is going to rise. It's already the third-largest expenditure of this government. We can't afford that. In my riding, I'm talking to my constituents, asking, "Would you, in all good conscience, tell your children, if they couldn't afford their mortgage, to go out and continue to spend on 14 of 24 household items?" I don't think that's the way we should be going. I can't in good conscience do that.

He spoke about the Drummond report and that Mr. Drummond, commissioned by them, had all kinds of

ideas that should be implemented, and they took none of those.

We fundamentally went ahead to the government before the budget and said, "You need to reduce spending significantly. You need to have a plan to create jobs." There are 600,000 people unemployed across the great province of Ontario today. There was none of that in there. And they did not reduce the deficit until at least 2017-18, and that's all a bunch of wishful thinking, in my estimation.

So, Speaker, we were very principled in our approach. We just said that we cannot support a budget that's not going to do that. Our kids are at stake—our grandkids' future. We need to have hope for them. We cannot support this budget in its current form.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to join the debate today.

Just in response to the member for Scarborough Southwest, who mentioned that the key to this budget is balancing the budget, indicative in that is what my honourable colleague from Beaches-East York mentioned just earlier in his statement. From the direction this government is heading in terms of schedule 28, it looks as though—and it's a cautionary tale to the backbenchers in the Liberal Party—you are looking to balance the budget by selling off almost each and every aspect of the public service of the province, and that is driven right through schedule 28 in this budget bill.

I would strongly advocate for members of the government side to take a look at this schedule because it opens up the doors to privatizing every public service in the province, even contracting OHIP services out to an American HMO, all without the approval of the Legislature and all without any scrutiny.

I would also add that this is Ornge times 100 times 1,000. It is the mistakes that we have learned from the past about to be repeated. It's just bizarre that the government wishes to ram this thing through. We had the finance minister attacking members of the opposition this week, by saying that we were playing obstructionist games when in fact we're doing nothing of the sort.

We're asking for fulsome debate, particularly given the ramifications of schedule 28 on our public services. They're attempting to privatize or open the doors to privatization, similar to what they've done with the horse racing industry. This is something that obviously is a cautionary tale, coming only from our side of the benches. We're hearing bell ringing. I would suggest you guys need a different motive here, because every time you ring the bells, we're not able to beat them up. You've got to stop ringing the bells and start getting them with your words. It's words that we create in this House; it isn't bell ringing. The people deserve to know the truth, and that comes through words.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Parry Sound-Muskoka has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to respond and thank the members from Beaches–East York, Scarborough Southwest, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and the member from Essex for their comments.

As I noted right at the beginning of my comments, the government is going from a \$15.3-billion deficit in last year's financial year to \$15.2 billion this year, and those are still scary numbers. We're still heading towards Mr. Drummond's predicted \$30-billion deficit and \$411 billion in debt by 2017. So we're still very much on the wrong track.

The government announced a big wage freeze in 2010, and we note that over half of the budget is spent on wages, and yet that has been a complete failure. The opposition has made constructive suggestions about a legislated wage freeze. We've also made constructive suggestions to do with having more skilled workers in the province—something very much needed. The government has not taken us up on those recommendations.

Most of the uncertainty in the world these days is being created by governments living beyond their means, by spending too much money. I've just returned from visiting a daughter in England and Ireland. That's the news over there, that governments are spending too much money. It's affecting the economy of the whole world and it's affecting things here in Canada. So this government has to start living within its means. The budget they proposed this year still has a \$15.2-billion deficit. That's not living within your means, and it's scary for our kids growing up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnett): Further debate?

Mr. Jonah Schein: It's my privilege today to speak on behalf of the people of Davenport and Toronto and to speak on the budget bill, Bill 55.

For the viewers at home, for the general public and for members of all parties in this House, I must draw your attention to the environmental implications of Bill 55. There are two major problems with Bill 55 as it relates to the environment. The first is that Bill 55 will drastically weaken environmental standards in Ontario. The second problem is the sneaky approach that this government has taken by burying these critical environmental changes within this bill.

With approaches like these taken by government, it's no wonder that people across this province have real concerns about the viability of this political system. When I speak to voters in my riding, they feel that their votes don't matter. They feel like their voices don't matter. And why should they? They see governments at all levels that fail to serve the public. Whether they elect Conservative governments in Ottawa or Liberal governments at Queen's Park, Ontarians feel that it's well-connected insiders who are really running the show.

They see governments that allow inequality to grow and they see governments that sell off our natural resources and do nothing to stand up for the environment. We must do better. We need government to listen to the people they serve, to create good jobs and a healthy

economy, to ensure fairness and to protect the vulnerable, and to steward the commons and protect the environment.

Instead, we have a government in Ontario that refuses to listen. For the first time in 50 years, there were no pre-budget consultations in Ontario. Those who worry about the state of democracy in Ontario had their worst suspicions confirmed in the recent budget process, when the only person that this government consulted was a private banker. Instead of public consultations, they gave us the Don Drummond report.

Now Bill 55 threatens to break some of our most important environmental commitments in Ontario. Going back to 1993, the Ontario Legislature passed something called the Environmental Bill of Rights. The Environmental Bill of Rights was a groundbreaking initiative. It was a piece of public policy that was internationally respected because of its commitment to the environment.

The Environmental Bill of Rights upholds the rights of Ontarians to be aware of and to be involved in all government decisions that significantly affect our physical environment. It has meant that any changes to environmental legislation and regulations are made public so that Ontarians can weigh in on matters and have their voices heard. Obviously I believe this is a good model because it's in all of our best interests to keep the environment healthy. And we can't do it alone. We must work together, and we need the input and support of Ontarians to protect our environment. By including proposed changes to environmental acts in Bill 55, however, this government is deliberately sidestepping the right of the public to provide input as it is enshrined in the Environmental Bill of Rights.

Why is that? Why would members from across this floor support this? Why would members on the other side of this floor support this? Well, some members of the government might not even know, or they might not understand the environmental poison pills that are buried in the budget bill. You see, the environmental changes in Bill 55 are interspersed through so many different schedules that you might not have noticed. But those who do know—if you are paying attention, you'd know that if these changes were put up to the test of public opinion, if they were put up on the environmental registry, as they should be, the members of this government would have to explain to the public why they are systematically weakening environmental protections in Ontario. I believe this is why you are avoiding debate and public scrutiny.

1520

What are these changes that the government is so eager to hide? First off, the government plans to quietly weaken the Endangered Species Act. If Bill 55 passes as is, the government will remove the protection of species located on private land, and I should add that most endangered species are in fact, in southern Ontario, on private land.

The government will remove requirements and deadlines for recovery strategies for species at risk, and

finally, Bill 55 will remove the ecological tests required of industry to be exempt from the Endangered Species Act—tests that were put in place to ensure that economic and industrial activity would continue as long as it met conditions of assessing the overall benefit of the project, considering the alternatives and mitigating harm to species at risk. These tests are meant to balance the environmental needs and the economic needs of Ontario.

But now, under Bill 55, any activity authorized under any legislation can be exempt from the Endangered Species Act, regardless of the impact on the environment. Obviously, this flies in the face of the Endangered Species Act and the entire intention behind it.

The same government that passed the Endangered Species Act in 2007 is now trying to remove the timelines, the commitments and the regulations that make the act an effective piece of legislation and hold governments to account.

Those aren't the only problems. This government is proposing the same type of amendments to other environmental acts, like the Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act, the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act and the Public Lands Act.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Sounds like Harper.

Mr. Jonah Schein: That's right. It sounds like Harper.

These proposals remove government oversight, widen the Minister of Natural Resources' discretion to interpret policies and delegate responsibilities to private entities while absolving the government of any liability.

Speaker, after reviewing these changes, it's very easy to see some common trends that are emerging in this current minority government. One trend is that this government doesn't want to listen. Instead, they want to unilaterally impose decisions on Ontarians, and they ignore what others have to say. We see this with how they're trying to ram this omnibus bill through without proper debate, and we see it with these amendments to the environmental acts in Bill 55 that circumvent the Environmental Bill of Rights and deliberately avoid public input to their proposed policies.

What we see here, Mr. Speaker, is a betrayal of public accountability. This is the common thread that ties together the fiasco at Ornge, the proposed changes to privatize ServiceOntario and the government's plan to gut environmental protection in our province. This government continues to reduce public oversight, to deregulate, to privatize and to divest themselves of their responsibility to govern.

On all fronts, Ontarians are not impressed. This message is very clear. We hear it from our constituents, and we hear it from people concerned across this province. The people of Ontario do deserve better. Ontarians deserve accountable and responsible government. Ontarians have the right to have their say on critical issues that affect their lives and the lives of their children. Ontarians have entrusted the government to protect our environment, only to be hit with a stream of broken promises.

As New Democrats, we know that we must do better, that we must rebuild the trust of Ontarians, and this is

what we set out to do this year. We listened, and we consulted with everyday folks across this province. We brought forward measures to make this budget a little bit fairer, we committed to making this Parliament work, and we continue to listen to Ontarians and to hear their concerns.

Speaker, what I'm hearing about Bill 55 is that people are very concerned. They're concerned about the changes to the environmental protections that this government is hiding in this bill, and they're concerned that they have been excluded from this important discussion. It's a discussion that they have a right to participate in. That is why my New Democrat colleagues and I will be working hard to see that Ontarians' voices are heard and that this bill reflects their wishes too.

I have a letter here that is written to the government with 58 signatories, some of the most respected environmental groups across this province and across this country. Speaker, I want to read you just a little bit from the letter: "The weakening of environmental laws that were designed to protect the health of our lakes, forests and wildlife is deeply disturbing. To do so by circumventing the requirements of the Environmental Bill of Rights, 1993 through omnibus legislation that denies the possibility for open public debate is very troubling. We thus fully support the recommendation of Ecojustice and the Canadian Environmental Law Association, 'that the environmental statutes, particularly those related to species protection, sustainable forest operations, protected areas, lakes and rivers protection, and public lands be withdrawn.'" They say, in closing, "We would like to assert our collective opposition to environmental deregulation and our profound disappointment in the government's approach to addressing its budgetary objectives."

This includes folks from the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, to Greenpeace, to Ontario Nature, to Earthroots, to EcoSpark, to Northwatch—as I said, 58 environmental groups that have real concerns about the environmental implications of Bill 55.

Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments.

Mr. Mario Sergio: I have enjoyed the presentation from the member from Davenport, and what caught especially my attention is the comment alluding to the consultation process. For the benefit of the member and the House, and the public as well, I have to say, Speaker, that prior to coming down with the budget, the government goes a long way in consulting with various members of the community, institutions, agencies, bankers, professional people.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Yeah, bankers. Fill the room with them.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Yes, it's important that we consult with those people as well, and the building industry, and the unions as well for their input. Of course, once the budget comes down, we always hope that it attracts the interest and support of every member in the House, but we know that it doesn't work that way all the time. The

fact is that the budget contains a lot of good things that we would like to see implemented as soon as possible, especially at this particular time when there are so many good sides with respect to incentives for the economy, and God knows we need jobs. We have summer coming up. A lot of jobs are opening up, more than ever, especially for our young people as well seeking jobs for the summer.

We have some 18 hospitals under construction. I'm very pleased that in my own riding of York West, actually, one is abutting my riding—I've been fighting for it: the brand new Humber River Regional Hospital. It's under construction. And we have the extension of the subway to York University. That's 3,000 jobs created in the north, building the cars. This is what the budget contains. So there's a lot of good things in there. I would hope that we can move it forward and get implementation of the contents of the budget.

Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments.

Mr. John O'Toole: I listened attentively to the member from Davenport's remarks and I'm quite in agreement with his remark with respect to the lack of public hearings. I've been here 17 years and I would say that in that time, it's the first time that a government, respectfully, did not give the people of Ontario a real voice. I'm sure there were private meetings with Mr. Sorbara and the Premier and that—probably a fundraiser, really. They had hearings with their friends, and possibly Chris Mazza bought a ticket, from Orme.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, look, he's making over a million dollars—

Mr. Mario Sergio: John, use the riding name.

Mr. John O'Toole: You had your time. What's most disappointing here is there really is no plan. I look at the students here. Your future is what we're talking about. They're spending money like a drunken sailor, some people would say. I'd say it's irresponsible, how they're spending money. When you look at this debate on Bill 55, there's 327 pages. It's an omnibus bill; in this there are 69 schedules. Now they're criticizing in Ottawa the Harper government that's running all of Canada; some of the opposition over there are criticizing him that it's an ominous bill.

This bill needs further discussion, not foreclosure on some kind of debate. I can only say this: Our leader looked at this bill and we didn't see any response to the dilemma of the economy—no control of spending. There's no respect for the input from Mr. Hudak and the opposition on a public sector wage freeze. We know now that that's about 60-some per cent of the total spending—\$128 billion, the budget—payroll. I say he's like Neville Chamberlain: peace at any price. They've paid for this through the nose, and now it's coming home to roost. I can't possibly support this budget.

1530

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to the member from Davenport, who made a number of excellent comments around the environment and the protection of our planet and of all that we hold dear as Canadians and as Ontarians.

But before he did that—and the point that I want to stress—he prefaced his remarks by saying this is the first time in some 50 years that there were not pre-budget consultations, and he is absolutely right. There were no pre-budget consultations for the people of Ontario, the ordinary people, to come forward, the hundreds of people who come forward each January and February as long as I have been here and as long as any of the members of the House have been here, who come here to make deputation on changes they want to see.

We know, and the member from York West talked about this, that the minister consults with his friends. We know that. We also know that in order to get into that inner circle to actually meet with the minister, you have to go through a number of hoops that ordinary people just cannot do. We know, because they come to us and say they tried to get a meeting with the minister around the budget process and were unable to do so. So then they come to the finance committee because at least at that point they can be heard.

The minister meets with people who tell him what he wants to hear. That has been the reality for far too long. You meet with those bankers, you meet with those captains of industry, you meet with people who want to talk about attrition or who want to talk all of those buzzwords of today.

Ordinary people don't want to talk about that. Ordinary people want to talk about how the budget is going to genuinely affect them, whether there is a cost to them if we raise up the cost of electricity and how they're going to pay for it. They want to know that their schools are safe. They don't want to talk about these mega-issues that bankers and others—that the minister only wants to hear.

I think that the member from Davenport was absolutely right: We can never again allow budgets to be presented in this House where the people have not had a direct say in advance.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm please to take these two minutes to speak to what the member from Davenport has said. He is certainly raising concerns for the environment.

I see that we have coming up this week, later on, on Thursday, a private member's bill to back off on the ban of the cosmetic use of pesticides. I think these are issues that are extremely important to discuss and to make sure we move forward and don't move backwards. I think there's significant support for the ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides, which has been in there. It's a major issue. It's one that we should be looking for—and what had been raised is the protection of endangered species today.

So we have to, as a group in here, be interested in the environment. Certainly our record on getting out of coal

and pushing green energy has been positive for the environment, and we have to make sure that we do not go backwards.

I hope on Thursday that the third party will be looking at that piece of legislation. It's a private member's bill that's very serious because it's backward movement. Certainly, that's not where I want to see Ontario go. That's not where Ontario is going.

We paid a great deal of dollars to get out of coal. Coal is cheap. We could have gone on with it. But in 2014, when the parts per million of CO₂ in to the atmosphere goes above 400 for the first time—and it's just a continuing upward trend that is putting more pressure on the environment and on the species today—we have to be cognizant of that.

The Liberal Party has been doing the right thing for the environment. I hope that this budget passes and we get on with the important work of cutting the deficit.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Davenport now has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Thank you for the contributions of the members from York West, Durham, Beaches–East York and Ottawa–Orléans.

In listening to the people in this House, I do believe that people think we need to preserve the environment. I think, as a member from the Progressive Conservatives said, there are members here who believe in consultation. I know that my colleagues from the NDP and the member from Beaches–East York think it's shameful that we haven't had consultation in this budget process.

I also believe that the majority of members in this House have the absolute wrong approach on how to protect the environment. That's what confuses me. How do you believe that we can protect the environment through deregulation, through privatization and through divestment of our responsibility as folks whose job it is to govern? You can't do it.

It's clear to me that this budget bill is bearing these environmental changes because they're doing nothing good for the environment. If this did something good for the environment, you would take it out and you would speak about it with pride. But you can't speak with pride about this because you know that what you're doing here is fundamentally detrimental to the natural environment, that Ontario will be a worse-off place because of this. That's why there's no consultation. That's why you're not putting this before folks who know far more than you do about what this will mean to the environment. I challenge you to go back to your communities and ask them about these changes and ask them, "Do you think the planet will be better off because of this?"

The member from Beaches–East York and I did our own public consultation in my riding of Davenport before the budget. I have to say, people were extremely skeptical that the future of this province was being left in the hands of a banker. It was hard for us to stand up and say, "You're wrong," because from this side it looks like our natural resources, our public good, is being sold off and privatized.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It's a pleasure to be able to comment on Bill 55 today and talk a bit about the budget. There's a lot to say on the budget. It's a very comprehensive document.

I want to make clear from the very beginning, contrary to what some opposition members may say, that we are not afraid to discuss the budget, we are not afraid to debate the budget. But we don't like the fact that the Conservative Party, the official opposition, continues to ring the bells whenever it's their turn to speak.

Mr. John O'Toole: Ornge.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I heard someone across the aisle yell, "Ornge." There's a place for that too: at committee. There's a place to debate it elsewhere. Where else can we debate the budget? Do we just close our ears and, like the old monkey photograph, see no evil, hear no evil, do no evil? We want to talk about the budget today. We can talk about Ornge another time, but the budget is important.

The first point to make, which is very important, is that the world economy has changed. The structure of the world's financial systems has changed drastically. To go back to 2008 and companies like Lehman Brothers just defaulting on their payments and other banks saying, "We need bailouts from the government"—here in Ontario we didn't sit still. We are the largest manufacturer of cars and car parts in all of North America. We surpass Michigan. We surpass any other jurisdiction—Quebec, California, anywhere else in North America. Here we maintain the best way and the best structure and the best companies to continue to make the best automobiles in all of North America. When they got into trouble in 2008, we didn't sit by and let them go into bankruptcy, Mr. Speaker. We supported them, Chrysler and General Motors especially. And guess what? As they improved and car sales went up, they repaid us the money.

You can see what's happening in Europe, where country after country after country is having problems, from Iceland to Greece to Spain. There are so many economies. It's even reaching France now—and perhaps, at some point, Germany. For the most part, a lot of the countries in the world have been affected by what happened in 2008 and 2009. Things have improved, but there's a big question mark: What's going to happen next? We're not sitting back and saying we're not going to do anything. We went forward with our budget, especially in light of having a minority government, especially in light of the fact that there has been a lot of opposition from both parties, especially the Conservative Party, opposing us.

1540

We spoke earlier about consultation and travel. How could we possibly travel and go from town to town, city to city, to discuss this when the House leaders weren't able to agree on how to form committees? Committees are what travel. You create committees, and there's a

committee that does the travelling and does the consultation. We had opposition from the very start, from day one. The opposition said, "No, we're not going to help you in forming committees," so for several months we didn't have committees, and that's why we couldn't travel. We're not saying we won't travel. We'll travel; we'll discuss the budget; we'll do what's important. But don't get in our way.

Mr. Bill Walker: You didn't strike the committees.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Committees were not formed. Someone from the opposite there is saying that there were no committees. They were not in place.

You are a new member. Sorry; with the greatest of respect, I will address the Speaker.

The opposition did not want committees—plain, period, full stop. How are we supposed to travel if the opposition won't form committees? Committees travel. We don't take the whole House and go sit somewhere else. We pick members from each of the parties, create a committee, and the committee starts travelling and getting input from town to town, from person to person, from corporation to corporation, from bank to bank. You can't do that when the opposition won't agree to form committees. So don't blame us. You're to blame, plain and simple.

Let's talk about what's happening right now. In spite of all this opposition, we presented a budget. We presented the budget here, in this Legislature. The key message was that we've got to keep the economy growing. We have to keep schools open. We have to keep hospitals open. We have to focus on the things that we decided to focus on years ago. We didn't stop full-day kindergarten and say, "You know what? We can't afford full-day kindergarten. Let's shut it down. We can't afford health care. Let's start closing some hospitals." Those were the days when the Conservatives were in power, when Mike Harris was the Premier. That's when teachers went on strike. That's when hospitals were closed. That's when there was a crisis in education, a crisis in health care. Nurses were called hula hoops. It goes on and on.

Now the opposition tries to read the budget in one day. There's a budget lock-up that starts in the morning, and I think it runs until about 4 p.m., in one day. The Conservatives come out and say, "We ain't supporting this. We're against it. I'm going to vote against it." That's irresponsible for an opposition party to do. When they get to speak next, and they will, I want people who are watching to know and I want Hansard to record that they will ring the bells. They will ring the bells. The Conservatives will ring the bells. Why? To waste time.

Let's talk about the budget in front of us. Last week we had constituency week. During constituency week, I had the opportunity to meet with residents, people, on the ground floor, grassroots people who came to visit me, and I got a chance to talk to them.

I had one student come in who said, "I can't afford my tuition. I'm afraid." First of all, we've put into the budget a plan to reduce or allow the taking off of 30% of tuition—grants for families. That didn't happen before.

We said, "You can take up to 30% off your tuition fees if you qualify." The person in front of me didn't know. We put them in touch with the proper places, and the guy, the man, the gentleman, the student, was very, very happy, saying, "I appreciate it. I did not know this program existed."

Compare that, members who are here today and those who are watching elsewhere or listening elsewhere—compare that to Quebec. Look what's happening right now in Quebec. There have been days and days and days of fighting, protests that are making international news. You can go on the BBC, on their website, and it says about Quebec continuing to fight between students and the government. It's going beyond our borders.

What's happening in Ontario? We passed a budget—or we're trying to pass a budget, at least. We're debating it today. We have the opportunity to talk about what's inside the budget today, and inside we are discussing issues like education.

I went to three different schools last week, Mr. Speaker. One of them, for example, is called St. Joachim school. They were actually celebrating the opening of the new part of their school. They were actually having an event. They invited the school trustee for the area, the councillor for the area, who happens to be my wife, and me to see and open the new facility. First we met in the gym, and then we walked through the school, and a massive part of it is new.

How did that happen? It didn't fall out of the sky. We funded it. We put money into the schools, and continue to, so that now they can open it. They said, "Starting next year, we're going to have full-day kindergarten."

We have said in the budget—the theme has been—we'll continue to invest money in education and health care, and balance the budget.

Continuing on with schools, I had the opportunity to go to a high school in my riding. It's called Porter Collegiate, but they also call it SATEC. There's a large section that works on high technology. I had the opportunity to see what's called a supercomputer. It's being funded by our government. That's why they invited me, as well, as the representative for the area. We went and saw the supercomputer that students from grade 11 and grade 12 are working on. There was not only the teacher of that program there, but we also had a professor from the University of Toronto present.

They watched and saw how the supercomputer worked. I was amazed at the high technology that this supercomputer works at. It actually brings several different computers together and projects what's going to happen in the future physically if these things continue to happen. They gave me an example of the universe, our Milky Way. They had traced a number of stars together and what they did was they had a view from the top and a view from the side and they brought them together so you had three dimensional views.

I will sit down if you are standing up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's interesting, when I hear the member from Scarborough Southwest talking about some of the issues that are before us. All I hear is more deception. We talk about the committee structure and their refusal to create—there are standing rules in this House and all we were asking is that this government follow them, and they refused to. And of course, they refused to strike that committee; it was just another chance to avoid going to the public and going to hearings before this budget. This is something that one of the honourable members was saying on this side that's never happened before in his memory. The government always goes to listen to the public. So this is just another case of them deceiving the public.

He talked about the Mike Harris government. Yes, they came in and they had a tough job because they were cleaning up after two previous governments that really took this province down to shambles, something like we're seeing today, when we're getting to the point we can't borrow money any more. They've spent so much money the banks are saying, "Enough is enough."

You know, the people of Ontario spoke then and they needed somebody to clean up this province. Of course, now, the government of the day brought—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to ask the member for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry to withdraw his unparliamentary comment.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I withdraw.

They talk about the bell ringing and, really, the message here is very clear: We made a commitment—we believed this government when they talked about living up to a promise of striking a committee if the House voted for it. And of course, we took them at their word and we did vote for it. Now we're finding that again they're not working with the government—not exercising the will of Parliament. So we're sitting here and, yes, we're ringing bells, but if they want this to stop, it will stop in a second. Strike the committee that this House voted for. That's all we're asking for. And tell the people why we're doing it.

1550

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to add a few comments to the comments from the member from Scarborough Southwest. I've heard from many people during constituency week because I as well was out in my five municipalities in my constituency, and I heard a lot from people about the lack of public hearings. They said that is the basis of democracy in this country. That the government would have the nerve or the gall, using other people's words, to actually bring forward a budget that had no public input from anyone—not from individuals, not from partners, not from agencies, not from other municipalities—is very disappointing for a lot of people in this province.

On the issue of standing committees, yes, there was a delay in forming the standing committees, but I can say that that delay wasn't just the opposition; that delay was

the government as well. The government wanted the committee structure to reflect a majority government, and in fact we're not in a majority government. We are in a minority situation here and the government doesn't have the right under a minority to have the majority on every committee. That is the truth.

On my critic tour as well I met with some mayors, actually, from around the province over the last week. Mayors are telling me that they're kind of tired of being treated like the kids and the government are the parents, and they would like to see some multi-year funding commitments. They'd like to see the multi-year capital budgets, as opposed to just finding out halfway through their year. I don't think the municipalities are real happy that they haven't had the opportunity either to be consulted around this budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mario Sergio: I've been listening very attentively to the well-rounded presentation by the member from Scarborough Southwest on the budget.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Well-rounded?

Mr. Mario Sergio: Well-rounded, yes.

Mr. Peter Shurman: You've got to be kidding me.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Well, I've been listening, the member from Thornhill. Perhaps he was too intent on his computer there, but I've been listening to the member from Scarborough Southwest, Speaker, and I have to say that he has delivered special attention to the economic aspect of the budget, and for good reasons. I think we are well on our way with our economic stance that we have taken over the last several months and the budget, which is in front of us today, to continue the strong role that we have on the economic front.

The member has alluded to the budget, the \$15 billion, 2017-18 elimination, and we can only do that if we continue to grow economically. We have to take a look at the world economic situation to catch the message and say we have to be very careful. I think our position has been to create jobs. In the month of March alone, we created some 46,000 jobs. Speaker, it speaks well for the action of this government, the direction we want to go, and it's not only in one particular area. We have made a commitment to continue with the implementation of full-day kindergarten. This is important for all our families in Ontario. It's not for one particular area of our province. We have said that our students in college and university will be enjoying a 30% tuition fee cut. This is to help them out, Speaker. We have competition coming from out of Canada, throughout the world, and we want to give them the best education. The budget is an important document, and I hope that we can continue to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the comments made by my colleague across the hall from Scarborough Southwest. It's very important, I think, that I reiterate again that this is the first time in over 50 years there wasn't pre-consultation to a budget. The people of

Ontario deserve that. The opposition parties, out of respect, deserve that. Had we had that, maybe we'd be in a different place today and we would already have a budget and we would be paying down some of the debt and deficit that we find ourselves in.

He referenced very specifically Mr. Mike Harris. Mike Harris made the tough decisions. He got our province out of debt that the two previous governments had left and back on track, something that the Liberals are not prepared to do or are capable of doing: making the hard decisions that will get us back to where we need to be. I'm proud of Mike Harris, as many people across Ontario are.

When he was Premier, Mike Harris did not have a \$15-billion deficit. Mike Harris did not have a \$411-billion debt—bigger than the rest of the provinces of our great Confederation combined. That's shameful, Mr. Speaker, and something we can't continue to move forward, or we're never going to give our children and our grandchildren the hope they should have, like we had growing up.

Mike Harris was straight with the people of Ontario. He told them what he would do, and he did it. He didn't make promises and then renege. He didn't go to stakeholders and just pull the plug from them.

Should I talk about the horse racing industry? I would ask, are the doctors happy currently? Are the teachers happy with the negotiation and consultation of the current government? I would suggest that that is not the case.

The third-largest expenditure is financing the debt, paying the debt service. Just think of all the programs, services, health care, education and industry we would have, how many jobs we would be creating, if we weren't wasting \$10 billion. With that \$10 billion that we're spending, there are no jobs created, there's no reduction in energy costs, they're not reducing spending. This budget was never, ever designed to do what the province needs.

We stand firmly where we are on our conviction: We need to make bold change to make this province the leader of Confederation once again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I return to the member for Scarborough Southwest for his two-minute response.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I appreciate the comments from all the members. I do apologize: I was just getting into the budget discussion and needed more time, but maybe when we get into third reading I'll have time. Let me make just a few quick comments here.

I wasn't around during the Mike Harris years, but I heard from my colleagues. My colleagues told me—and I can be corrected on this—that there was very little committee work done. I remember the megacity—we debated that. I think they only met for a little bit of time. This was a very big issue at that time. I won't go into details, but the NDP member—he was present here earlier—was the former mayor of East York, and there

was little time to discuss whether or not his municipality and the rest of Scarborough all the way to Etobicoke should be torn apart and made into one megacity; no proper consultation there.

Third readings: very little third readings. You can go through the Hansards. I've gone through some of them. Almost no third readings and very few committee hearings on very important issues. They left health care and education in the worst shape I've ever seen in the 50 years I have lived. I remember that the first thing they did was to create a crisis in health care.

Let me speak again to the economy for the last 30 seconds I have here. Always remember: We did not step back. We brought forward a budget that we plan to balance, I think, by 2017-18, and we're committed to that. But we're not going to back down from education. We're not going to back down from health care. We're not going to back down from all the other things we have placed on the table here in front of this Legislature.

I would only say, let's hope the Conservative Party debates this issue and doesn't ring the bells, because they're up next, and I want to hear what they have to say about the budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It's an honour to rise in the House this afternoon to debate the Liberal government's proposed budget, Bill 55. It seems to me that the only priority the Liberal government should have at this point in time is to address the economic crisis and the challenges we have in this province. Jobs need to be created, and the debt needs to be reduced. The reckless spending must stop, and the books must be brought into balance.

In the case of the Liberal government, they have a spending problem. More importantly, they have an extreme lack of respect for the tax dollars coming in from hard-working men and women right across the province. I think it's fair to say that we would have a lot more respect for this government, for the Minister of Finance and for the Premier of the province if they admitted that for the last nine years they have mismanaged Ontario's finances.

Currently, Ontario is staring directly in the face of a \$30-billion deficit and a \$411-billion debt. We have almost 600,000 men and women out of work in Ontario, Speaker. These are major problems. No matter how you spin it, Ontario is facing some tough times ahead, and they will be even tougher if the problems of today continue to be ignored. It is impossible to solve a problem if you never admit that you have one.

1600

The government is not addressing the issue at hand, and because the government is not addressing the issue at hand, they cannot and will not solve Ontario's debt and jobs crisis. The budget fails to take the action required to prevent a \$30-billion deficit and does nothing to create jobs and grow our province's economy.

Speaker, jobs, debt and economic growth are impossible to separate. If Ontario continues to increase its debt, it will fail to attract businesses and fail to grow the economy.

My colleagues and I in the PC caucus have been very clear about these things and the problems that Ontario is facing, and the party opposite must do something to solve these problems. We have a clearly defined plan. We're willing to face the current fiscal challenges head on. An Ontario PC government would have brought in an immediate mandatory public sector wage freeze—no exceptions and no special rules—and a plan to fix our broken public sector salary arbitration system to respect the ability of taxpayers to pay the bills, to respect local economic circumstances. We certainly encourage the Liberals and all members in this House to support our PC bill that was presented by my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London, that's going to be voted on later this week. We encourage all members to support that bill.

While private sector unemployment has reached, as I said previously, over half a million people, public sector salaries have increased by 46%, Speaker. As a small business owner who employs over 65 people, I know that when things were slow in our family business, we couldn't afford to hand out bonuses or give raises to employees. This is the reality of running a private sector business. Every business owner knows you must make tough choices to keep costs and revenues in balance. The current government refuses to make these difficult choices, choosing instead to borrow and borrow and borrow. It's simply unsustainable.

I believe that we should be fair. If we can't afford raises, then there should not be raises handed out. As elementary as it sounds, money does not grow on trees. Government has to remember that the money they are spending will run out and they need to be good fiscal managers. If a province is suffering financially, then there should not be raises handed out to public sector employees.

We on our side of the House also believe that there should be competition in the delivery of government services. I don't believe that the same public sector unions should get the same contract each and every year. Open it up for competition. Let the best quality of service at the best price to the taxpayer reign supreme. Whether it's the public sector unions, private sector unions, small businesses or not-for-profits, we want the best quality of services at the best price for the taxpayers who pay the bills and depend on those services.

Speaker, the government opposite has no jobs plan and no debt control plan. This budget is trying to get off the ground without having either a pro-growth jobs plan or a deficit reduction plan. It has no jobs policy and no plan to deal with Ontario's crippling debt that they themselves have created.

Of course, we woke up this morning to hear the sad news about RIM possibly reducing a billion dollars in company costs, potentially eliminating 6,000 jobs within their company, which will hit the K-W region particularly hard.

It's not business as usual for the private sector, and this Liberal government needs to make change in the public sector as well.

I said it yesterday, I say it again today, and I'll say it tomorrow, for however long it takes: There is no need for Ontario to be condemned to a \$411-billion debt; there's no reason Ontario should be condemned to a continuing stagnant economic growth regime. So I will continue—and my colleagues beside me, as well—to promote our Ontario PC plan to reduce the size in overall cost of government, to build and grow our economy with new jobs, and we will ensure that Ontario will lead again.

We owe this to the people of Ontario. We owe this to Ontario businesses of all sizes. We owe this to all those who chose to make Ontario home, as well as those born and raised here. They've invested their lives in this great province, and they know, like we do, that Ontario is capable of becoming great again, the leader in Confederation.

At precisely the time we need to make Ontario more competitive, this budget throws up a brand new \$1.5-billion roadblock to job creation by cancelling tax cuts for businesses. How is this helping bring business to Ontario? As I meet with stakeholders and small business owners and with my constituents, they're very concerned about the direction that this government, in this budget in particular, is taking Ontario on.

Of course, we're faced with this financial crisis in the province, staring directly in the face of a \$30-billion deficit and a debt that could reach \$411 billion through the Liberals' mismanagement. Of course, we've seen billion-dollar boondoggles like eHealth and the Ornge scandal now—

Mr. Bill Walker: Mississauga power plant. Oakville.

Interjection.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: And the Mississauga power plant, as my colleague reminded me, and the Oakville power plant.

So, Speaker, we need a select committee on Ornge, and therefore I call for adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. McNaughton has moved the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1607 to 1637.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing while the table staff count.

Thank you. You may take your seats.

All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing while you're counted.

Thank you very much. You may take your seats.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 30; the nays are 40.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex still has the floor.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Again, I'm pleased to rise to debate the budget bill presented by the finance minister. As we've said over and over again, electricity prices for the average Ontario consumer have doubled under this government—doubled—and they're projected to rise another 46% in next five years.

Sadly, Speaker, on May 3, Sobeys in downtown Wallaceburg in my riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex announced that they would be shutting their doors and laying off 70 employees, a sad day for families in Wallaceburg and in my riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. Company representatives have stated that after “an extensive and careful review” of the operation, it was determined that the store is no longer a viable option, with a major factor being the skyrocketing increase in energy costs that are facing the store. It's clear that the Liberal government's policies have cost Ontario yet another 70 jobs in my riding.

Businesses are closing, energy prices are skyrocketing and nothing is being done to deal with this. We cannot support a budget that is blatantly ignoring the reality that Ontario is facing.

And we can't ignore it when the government doesn't keep their word. They agreed—the health minister herself agreed to a select committee to study Ornge. Because of this, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. McNaughton has moved the adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say “aye.”

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1640 to 1710.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing while you're counted by table staff.

You may take your seats. Thank you.

All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing while you are counted by the Clerk.

You may take your seats. Thank you.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 25; the nays are 37.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I was encouraged to hear some of the discussions that have been held on this Bill 55 from our Conservative member and on behalf of the government of the day that they are concerned with jobs. Essentially, we need to look at how we're going to be creating jobs. Unfortunately, I don't think that our colleagues have the answers, because the walls that they're looking to build are only going to create more

problems for individuals looking at developing jobs. The government of the day doesn't seem to have those answers.

But I'm optimistic when they're talking about their jobs and prosperity fund that they're seriously going to consider the proposal that we have developed as the NDP as far as rewarding individuals who actually create a job, which will be a step forward. But in creating jobs, when the government is also looking at privatizing and cutting back jobs, it's really concerning with the Ministry of the Environment and also the Ministry of Natural Resources, two really big parts of Ontario where we're going to be cutting back jobs.

A lot of the concerns that I keep hearing are about the privatization that's going to be happening. Again, during constituency week, when I walked through some of the ServiceOntario offices, their biggest concern was what they are going to be able to do and what services they're going to be able to provide, ongoing, to the communities that they serve.

When you look at some of the changes that they're looking at bringing in through the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, the Public Lands Act, the Crown Forest Sustainability Act, these are all acts that are going to be changing and we need those public consultation periods in order to have those discussions with all of our communities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you for the opportunity to address Bill 55, the budget bill. I have listened with great interest to all of the members in this House this afternoon who have spoken to this important bill and who have spoken about the issues that are affecting their ridings. This is what we're here to do.

Before I do that myself I must express my confidence in the path that we are taking to grow Ontario's economy and to balance the budget. These are two fundamental steps to the well-being of all Ontarians. As we have seen in recent days, we are asking everyone to play their role in helping us to tighten the belt, including those who are high-income earners and public sector workers. At the same time, we have also committed this government to protecting the important gains that we've made, both in education and in protecting our public health care system. These are the issues that are important to me as a resident and as a representative of my riding of York South–Weston.

These are the issues that are also important to my neighbours and to my community. Allow me to mention just a few of these issues: full-day kindergarten, maintaining small class sizes, supporting students with the 30% off Ontario tuition grant and the grants for student needs—that's very important to many of my constituents—and finding more value for money in our health care system as it comes under increasing pressures from our aging demographics. More home care is tremendously important to the seniors that live in my riding.

We have to continue to prioritize our needs. We need to find ways to do things better and more efficiently in the climate that we are living in and reduce our debt so that the Ontario economy can continue its recovery.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: Out of respect, I want to stand and respond to the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex because he put a lot of thought and time into the very elementary pieces of the budget that seem to disappoint him and, I would say, most Ontarians.

It was quite interesting: I read an article this week—I was just reading it while he was speaking, actually—that says the Ontario budget 2012 is a missed opportunity. Now, what this article does go on to say is that Dwight Duncan, the Minister of Finance, respectfully, missed an opportunity to do the right thing. I looked at the references here and there are people like Don Drummond commenting and Angus Reid opinion polls.

What it says is, "Ontario needs to take sweeping action if it is to avoid crisis. With \$10 billion in increased spending," and five years of deficits will add \$77 billion to the existing debt and Duncan needs to find some personal resolve to do the right thing, as Paul Martin did in 1995.

I think the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex was on that track when he was talking about, "The evidence is there." In fact, the member that just spoke from York South-Weston, I think it is, has been reading the stuff that Dwight and the Premier are giving you to read. Most of it is not correct.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I wrote it myself.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, it's totally incorrect. All of the people in Ontario know that there's no action on jobs. The economy has gone south. Research In Motion, in their time, has gone from first to last. Most of Ontario has gone down. You should quit working so hard on these things. Stay out of the way of business and let them do the job. What you're doing, really, in Ontario is ruining the economy—highest unemployment ever in the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to take this opportunity to comment on the words from the member of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex. He spent a lot of time talking about jobs, and jobs are very important for this province.

There's one thing that he mentioned that I would really like to point out. He said, "We should have a new way of doing things regarding public service jobs." Sometimes I wonder why the Conservatives and the Liberals aren't on this together because what he's talking about is, if you want to go into the private sector, then you have to have a request for proposals, and those jobs go all over, like the MNR jobs going to Tennessee. That's a decision that, if you're going to do a new way of doing jobs and you want to go for the lowest bidder—because once you take those jobs out of the public service and go to open requests for proposals, because of

the North American free trade agreement, a few people have signed that—you no longer have control where those jobs are going. In the long term, that's going to hurt you—

Mr. John O'Toole: John, there's a seat for you right here.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, no. But in the long term that's going to hurt you, because you take our MNR jobs, with our fishing licences, with our moose tags—and people already didn't trust the moose tag system when it was administered in our country and now they're wondering. They don't know where it's going to be administered. That is a huge problem.

1720

With public service jobs, you can't have it both ways. You can't say, "We're going to keep jobs in this country; we're going to create jobs in this country," but open them up for requests for proposals. That's one of the problems with this budget.

The new way of doing jobs in Ontario is one of the things that we're ringing the bells about. Ornge: We're ringing the bells a lot about Ornge, but that's also a new way of doing jobs, and do we really want to go there? Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I return now to the member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'd like to thank the MPPs from Algoma-Manitoulin, York South-Weston, Durham and Timiskaming-Cochrane for their feedback in response to my remarks.

The government needs to balance the budget to encourage business in this province and to create jobs. This is something that the government can no longer ignore, nor can it be placed on the back burner. Of course, this budget is doing nothing to get the fiscal house in order, which is what I talked about previously. There needs to be an immediate action plan on behalf of this government to solve the financial disaster that they themselves have created.

It's a simple concept: If there is a problem, you address it. If you have run out of money, you stop spending. If you keep spending, eventually you will become bankrupt. You will be the Greece, the Portugal, the Spain of Canada, and surely that's not what the members opposite really want to create in their time in government.

There is only a small window of time to solve these problems. If you wait too long, eventually there is nothing that you can do to solve the problem. With the path we're on, I fear that Ontario will become another sad story of economic failure.

As I've stated here today, I'm going to continue, and our caucus will continue, to oppose this budget bill and this legislation and this strategy laid out by this government. We are staring at a deficit that could hit \$30 billion and a debt that could hit \$411 billion. This government, this Premier, Dalton McGuinty, and his finance minister have to get their fiscal house in order. They've created

such a disaster in this province that investors are fleeing; they're running in opposite directions.

Speaker, I encourage all my colleagues to oppose this budget. It does nothing to get Ontario back on the right track.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 55.

I'm going to just talk about three things today, because I only have 10 minutes, and there's, like, 350 pages of that bill and I won't have time to speak to them all.

Those three issues that I want to talk about, though, are about protecting and enhancing public service, as opposed to privatizing it and potentially selling it off. I want to talk about interest arbitration, because I think that there is a real misunderstanding of interest arbitration by some members in this Legislature. I want to talk about the community and social service budget increases that the minister has been talking about each time we're in question period. We hear we're improving health care, we're protecting health care, we're protecting education, we're hiring teachers and we're increasing the community and social service budget. Those are the three areas that I'm going to spend my time on.

The Minister of Community and Social Services has told us that he's increasing the budget by 2.7%. That's the only budget that is seeing an increase. But in fact, this past week, when I was doing my critic tour, and today, actually, when the Niagara region was in for their Niagara Week, I'm hearing about the community start-up fund and the cuts to it. This is a fund that helps recipients who may find themselves in a situation where they're being evicted or they've had to move. It provides some minimal funding each two-year period to assist people with children—I think it's \$1,500, or up to \$1,500 in two years, and for singles, it's up to \$750. That fund is being cut by 50%. What I'm hearing from the mayors and what I'm hearing from the Niagara region and what I'm hearing through my colleagues from the city of Hamilton is that they can't take these cuts—\$2.5 million in the Niagara region. Our Ontario Works rolls are at the highest they've been in many years. I understand that in the city of Hamilton that they have something like 59,000 people on Ontario Works and ODSP, and they're going to realize a \$1.8-million cut. The minister has said he's actually increasing the budget, but in fact he is decreasing the budget for those most vulnerable in our society.

At some point, I hope I'm going to have the opportunity in question period to actually ask that question, because the people I've talked to who work in community and social services in those areas said that they don't know what they're going to do about these cuts. They can't increase taxes. We don't have any jobs in those areas. We have no huge job increases on the horizon, and they don't know how they're going to absorb those cuts. They don't have the ability to increase taxes because the taxpayers can't take any more of that.

On the issue of interest arbitration, there's this misnomer that the system is broken and that we have to fix it, that the time frames don't work and that people do better because they're able to go to arbitration than if they negotiate a settlement. The people who have the right to go to arbitration are the same people who don't have the right to strike. There's a reason for that. Do you want your police, your firefighters and your registered nurses and your health care workers having the right to strike when they're providing such an essential public service? No, you don't. So the option for them is to go to interest arbitration. It's a system that has been in place for many, many years, and it has worked up until now.

I took the opportunity to do a little bit of research around arbitrated versus non-arbitrated settlements over the last 11 years. If you look at firefighters, for example, they had 49 collective agreements that were negotiated or arbitrated over the last 11 years across this province. In fact, with the exception of three years, the arbitrated settlements were actually less than the negotiated settlements, except in three of 11 years.

If you look at the police agreements—many of you may have had the police in to visit you the week before last for their lobby week. In fact, in the last 10 years, for police only 6% of all the 38 collective agreements that were negotiated were settled via interest arbitration. So 94% of those contracts were actually freely negotiated between the police association and the police employers. So, I don't think that the system is necessarily broken.

For many years, I actually negotiated with the Ontario Nurses' Association in the hospital sector, in the community sector, in the homes sector. In fact, in many cases—and I'll give you a couple of examples. A charitable home for the aged, for example, in the Niagara region, which was unionized—and the nurses in that charitable home were making \$6 an hour less than their counterparts in, say, the Niagara regional homes or other homes in the area. We went to arbitration for four different contracts, and it took four years to get them up to parity with the nurses in the homes for the aged in the Niagara region. So, arbitrators are looking at the ability to pay, and I think it would be a mistake trying to interfere in that neutral process. If employees do not have the right to strike, then they have to have the right to go to some process that will be fair and neutral to them.

The third issue I want to talk about is privatization and potential sell-offs. There is a myth here as well that, in fact, public and private sector wage increases are really different. If you look at the last 20 years, they're not; in fact, they're very close. The only area where there is a little bit of difference is that women tend to make a little bit more in the public sector. Men tend to make more in the private sector. When we talk about low wages, do we want everybody making 12 or 13 bucks an hour?

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I have friends who actually work in the bank, people who have worked in the financial industry for 30 years, who are still making 20 bucks an hour. After 30 years of employment, they're making \$20 an hour with the same

bank that they've worked for all those years. Those people surely didn't get 3% increases in all of those years. And new employees going to work at the banks—I know people who are starting at \$12 an hour, and they come from a financial institution, maybe have been off for a couple of years to have a couple of kids and come to the bank to make 12 bucks an hour. How do you raise families in today's economy?

This austerity-type budget and the short fix of potentially selling off our public services to the private sector or moving public sector jobs into the private sector is going to be a short-term fix. It isn't going to do anything in the long run for people in this province.

You know, if housing prices weren't going up, groceries weren't going up by 4%, hydro up by 50% and expected to go up even higher, our gas bills, our water bills—everything's going up and yet we're expecting employees in this province, whether it's public sector or private sector, to do more with less money. And that just is not right.

I don't know how we sit here as legislators, making the amount of money that we make, and can justify saying, "We're going to move this off to the private sector because we can save some money in the short term," knowing that when it moves to the private sector, all it's going to do is drive those wages down.

Many people are working two and three jobs in this province. In fact, I read about somebody in the newspaper about a week ago who is here in Toronto. He was a permanent immigrant from another country who was working six jobs, 20 hours a day, six days a week. The only day he didn't work was Sunday, so that he could actually go to his church and spend time with his family. He was making \$30,000 a year on those six jobs. And then, he actually went and got some training in farm implementation and now has a job making \$50,000 a year, but he still has two part-time jobs to get to that \$50,000, trying to raise a family, trying to buy a house in this province.

I hesitate to say that selling off our public sector or moving our public sector employees to the private sector is going to be good for Ontarians. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: One of the problems when you have only 10 minutes is that you're unable to cover as much territory as I know the member would like to, because she would have mentioned how happy she was to see Highway 406 extended, at a cost of a \$110-million investment by this government, right through to Welland. I know, as a former mayor of Welland, that she would be delighted to see that happening. That was despite some very challenging economic circumstances and in a riding which is not represented by a member of the government, either federally or provincially. That was strictly a provincial project in that case.

And she would have been happy to see, as the people from Niagara would, the YMCA being approved for funding out in Grimsby, the riding represented by Mr.

Hudak, the leader of the Conservative Party. The water treatment plant taking place, a big project in Grimsby, the new hospital in St. Catharines, which will serve much of the Niagara region—a host of things happening in the Niagara region designed to boost the economy.

There is a dilemma: Governments, at a time when the stimulus is required, have to expend those dollars in the stimulus. But there comes a day when governments have to deal with deficits as well.

I recommend to the member a very good book that I've read. I hope my own treasurer doesn't read it. It's called *Minding the Public Purse*, by Janice MacKinnon, who is the former NDP finance minister in Saskatchewan. She was going through the kind of dilemma that government faced, somewhat similar to what our government faces, and the many challenges there. For instance, the NDP was forced—they would say forced—to close 52 rural hospitals in the province of Saskatchewan. They're not mean-spirited people. They didn't want to do this. But they looked at economic circumstances and knew that services had to be delivered in a different way.

I just wish the member had the full 20 minutes to be able to expand upon her thoughts—

Ms. Cindy Forster: I wish I had an hour.

Hon. James J. Bradley: —because they were very good thoughts for the members of this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: The member for Welland just said she wished she had an hour, and I could use a bit more time on this hit as well.

In commencing your presentation, you talked about program cuts and explained the value of a program and the unfortunate circumstance that it may be threatened, and you posed the question, how do people absorb these kinds of cuts? As you've indicated, people feel they can't handle any more taxes and tax increases, and I fully agree with you on that point. Oftentimes, we know how it works: Cuts to government programs during tough economic times do lead to layoffs, so you're looking down the barrel of program cuts and you're looking down the barrel of layoffs.

The member mentioned, I think, union negotiations with the nurses' association. I would hope that government unions are looking at this and looking at alternatives. I would hope nurses and other government unions aren't merely waiting almost flat-footed for the threat of layoffs, for the threat of government program cuts. Maybe that's the old-school way of doing things. I would hope all organizations are looking at alternatives. Of course, "wage freeze" has been bandied about for a number of months now, both voluntary and mandatory.

You mentioned privatization—not a fan of privatization, but there is a case to be made for contracting out, for outsourcing. We do have to do more with less money. We have examples in our riding as well of people who do hold down three jobs. Oftentimes there is light at the end of the tunnel, but—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank my colleague here from Welland, who sometimes I wish would talk a little bit more than 10 minutes because she does articulate a lot of the needs. She does have the experience and the knowledge to back up a lot of the strong words that she uses.

We're just returning from our constituency week. One of the issues that came up repetitively while I was going through the communities was exactly the one point she brought up, which is the community start-up fund being cut by 50%. We use words like it's a government program; it's something that is essential. But really this is an opportunity for certain individuals to have a new life. When we're dealing with individuals who are grief-stricken through our First Nations or people that are in women's shelters, or even men's shelters, these funds go a huge way to starting a new life for these individuals. It gives them an avenue where they don't have to go to the abusive or the challenged environment they were in. This is something that they had in order to move on with a new life. It's really difficult for them to look at that as an option. So now the choice is, "I won't have that fund. I won't have that ability to move on," so what we're essentially doing is forcing them back to an environment that was not beneficial to them to start off with.

The other point that she brought up really briefly is the concerns that we have with privatization, where this government is going. Yes, it will drive down wages, which will take away from our economy. But it would also drive the cost up, and we're going to lose sight, because once we make this privatization, once we make that move, it becomes about profits, and when you deal with profits, you lose the services, you lose that aspect of bringing that service to our communities, and it really is a detriment to us all. We need to keep that in mind.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I want to start off complimenting the member from Welland for actually engaging in debate today and not ringing the bells.

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I think the issue in front of us today, the budget, is a very important issue. I cannot think of a more serious issue than how our finances are going to work for the next few years and making decisions on where to spend, where to cut and how to grow our economy. She touched on some very important points. I know some of them had to do with labour. I think it's a difficult decision around the world: Do we spend or do we cut back with austerity measures?

I think her points were very valid about the contracts and making sure that we keep arbitration on the table. When you look at situations such as those in Wisconsin, where the governor decided that he was going to intervene and limit collective bargaining rights for most state employees, as well as force them to contribute more money to their health insurance and pensions—I caught a bit on television, and read about it. Our government is not doing that. We are keeping labour issues front and

centre. We're doing our best to maintain that collective bargaining still exists.

I also wanted to touch on what we are doing—I only have 30 seconds here—with the budget. We are, first of all, more than anything else, trying to balance the budget and complete that by 2017-18, which I think is very important. Everyone has a role to play in this budget. For every additional \$1 of new revenue outlined in this budget, there are \$4 in savings and cost-containing measures. Over three years, the plan will make a number of changes and hopefully bring better prosperity in light of the worldwide conditions that exist today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Welland has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, and thank you for your comments. I think I'm just going to use my two minutes to talk about an example of privatization that happened—I think it probably happened under the Harris government, but it has continued under the Liberal government, and that's the issue of home care. Our home care system is in a mess, to put it mildly. It is fragmented. The care that our seniors and our clients being discharged from the hospital are receiving is piecemeal. It's almost sometimes like—I remember when I was a teenager and worked in the canning factory. You've got a different worker, whether it's a nurse or a personal support worker or a health care aide, seeing these vulnerable people at home on a daily basis. We've got numerous readmissions to hospitals because there isn't enough money in the system and the money that is in the system is strained because somebody is making a profit off of home care. The government has had the opportunity over the last two terms to actually change that system and move it back into a not-for-profit system so that all the money is actually going to provide care.

We heard that privatization is really pushing wages down for health care workers, who find themselves in a position that they can actually make more working in Tim Hortons than they can caring for seniors and the ill in our province, because they don't even get paid travelling time, even though their distance between clients may be half an hour or 45 minutes. That's what privatization has done to home care, and I suggest that that is where it may end up if we move to privatizing other public services.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for Peterborough.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to get a few words on the record today on Bill 55, the budget bill. If I may start off, I have a news release here. This is certainly relevant to the budget, the capital portion of the budget that is allowing for the extension of Highway 407 from Brock Road in Pickering to Harmony Road in Oshawa. Just this afternoon, this was dropped on my desk. It happens to be a news release from the regional municipality of Durham, and it's such a good release. I know people will be watching. I just want to quote from it. It said:

"Durham Region Celebrates the Province's Highway 407 Announcement."

May 24, 2012, Whitby, Ontario—"Durham region is celebrating today's announcement by Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty and the provincial government, which will see essential work move forward on Highway 407 through Durham region.

"We are very thankful to Premier McGuinty and his government for today's commitment to the required Highway 407 work through Durham," said Durham regional chair and chief executive officer Roger Anderson. 'Premier McGuinty's agenda includes a heavy focus on jobs and the economy, and this is a significantly positive step.'"

It goes on to say: "The commitment to this work has strong support by regional elected officials; local councillors from the eight area municipalities; residents; members of Durham's many chambers of commerce, boards of trade, business associations; individual companies; and other organizations that have long viewed this investment in infrastructure as crucial to the economic success of Durham region and the province.

"I recognize that this project is a big expense for the province, but the jobs that will be created during construction, and as a result of construction, will greatly benefit not just Durham region but the GTA and Ontario as a whole," said Chair Anderson. 'As Durham regional chair, I want to thank everyone who was involved in making the Highway 407 expansion a priority, and I want to especially acknowledge Joe Dickson, MPP for Ajax-Pickering, and Tracy MacCharles, MPP for Pickering-Scarborough East, and all of Durham's MPPs'"—I guess that includes members of the opposition, from Whitby-Ajax, Oshawa and Durham—"and MPs for their help and support."

"Construction of the Highway 407 east extension is essential to enable access to Durham's supply of employment lands, which in turn will lead to long-term job creation. Today's announcement indicates that the province of Ontario recognizes that economic growth in Ontario depends on this vital east-west transportation corridor."

That's very good news, as part of our budget bill, Bill 55. By this press release, I assume that the members from Whitby-Ajax, Oshawa and Durham are supporting this, which means they should be supporting the budget, Bill 55, which indeed contains the provision of the capital program to extend 407 east from Brock Road to Pickering, to Harmony Road in Oshawa. I assume that they may be standing in support of our budget when we have a vote on Bill 55. I look forward to their support, the three of them, in supporting this initiative, which is included in our budget. Mr. Speaker, they may be breaking ranks in order to support, as indicated by this press release. I take this press release at face value, that they will be joining us to make sure that we make those strategic investments in infrastructure in the province of Ontario.

I want to get on to something else. This is the Thursday, May 17, 2012, edition of the Peterborough Examiner, a great newspaper—owned by Sun Media, but it's a very good newspaper.

The title here is: "Belleville to Get 400 Call Centre Jobs." It goes on to say that OLS On-Line Support services, which is headquartered in Prince Edward Island, was looking right across Canada and looking at every province in order to establish their sixth call centre, and they looked to Belleville, Ontario, as a great place to do business in Ontario, because Ontario is a great place to do business, as exemplified by this company that is coming to Belleville, Ontario—indeed, 400 new jobs.

I'd just like to quote the mayor of Belleville—a great guy; I had the opportunity to meet him; Neil Ellis:

"This is just fantastic," Mayor Neil Ellis said, recounting the city's ongoing work to assist OLS as it attempted to establish "a call centre right here in Belleville. Mayor Ellis was beaming that day, with the announcement that they chose Belleville for these 400 new jobs. I'm sure we join with the member from Prince Edward-Hastings in welcoming OLS On-Line Support to Belleville, with 400 new jobs—very important.

Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to go on. Of course, Bill 11, that we have here before the House—and within our budget, we have funds set aside for several development funds. We anticipate the southwestern Ontario development fund. We already have a development fund in eastern Ontario.

I just want to read a letter that was sent to me from Bill Davie. He's vice-president of Dynacast in Peterborough.

"Dear Jeff"—very personable.

"Re: Eastern Ontario development fund (EODF)

"The EODF program has come to a successful conclusion for us.

"We are grateful for the financial assistance that we received, which helped support investment in capital assets with respect to the Montreal business transfer and investment in automation equipment and facility improvement as well as other important initiatives. These initiatives have had a positive influence on the Peterborough plant in terms of revenue growth and increase in head count.

"On behalf of Simon Newman, our CEO; Adrian Murphy, our CFO; Herve Mallet, our general manager and everyone at our plant in Peterborough," we want to "thank you for your support."

That's a good indicator, Mr. Speaker, of the success of the EODF. In fact, another company in Peterborough, last Wednesday, McCloskey Brothers, received two grants under the EODF. They were having a job fair in Peterborough last Wednesday, which would have been the 23rd. They were advertising for assemblers, machinists, welders, other high technical skills. They had this job fair; a lot of people turned out. In fact, Mr. Speaker, they had a billboard in front of their company on Highway 28, just outside of Peterborough, advertising that they were going to have this job fair and everybody was indeed welcome to attend—again, economic growth that we're moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, I tend to always subscribe to the words of Mark Carney. Mark Carney is the governor of the

Bank of Canada and is recognized around the world as being one of the best of the central bankers. In fact, he gave a very interesting speech to the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce on April 2, 2012. He was giving a review of what's happening in Canada and, indeed, Ontario's economy.

If I may, I want to just quote here from page 2 of his speech. He said, "Our labour market has bounced back too. All of the 430,000 jobs lost through the recession had been recovered as of early last year, and a further 180,000 jobs have been added since then. Most of the jobs created" here "have been in the private sector and in industries paying" well "above-average wages."

Look, Mr. Speaker, that's non-partisan. I mean, who could really challenge the words of the governor of the Bank of Canada, who is doing continuous research on what's happening in Canada's and Ontario's economy?

I'd also like to make reference to another article from Mr. Carney of Thursday, April 14, 2012, when he anticipates that the Canadian economy is on track to regain its full production capacity sometime early in 2013. That means the economy could be going full tilt, and the economy will be soaking up all the spare resources, which now has occurred. The slack would be taken up—and look forward to more job creation.

One thing that's also very important to my riding, Mr. Speaker, is the auto industry. General Motors represents about 25% of the economic activity in Peterborough riding through active employees, retired employees and those companies that make up the General Motors supply chain.

Just recently, there was an extensive report done by the United States government talking about the future of the auto industry in North America. The title of that

article is, "Auto Makers Set to Rev up Recovery." In fact, the bouncing back of vehicle sales is anticipated to be about 15 million in North America this year. It certainly shows that the auto industry is bouncing back. Indeed, they're saying that in North America, there could be a desperate need for increased production capacity as we go forward. And it just happens to mention in here maybe looking at the GM truck plant that currently sits idle in Oshawa, Ontario, and other facilities that could indeed be cranked up as anticipated demand is growing very quickly in the auto sector.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just gave a bit of an overview of what Bill 55—and needs in my part of eastern Ontario. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on a point of order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. I rise on a point of order to clarify a statement I made in question period on May 15, 2012. In my response to the member from Scarborough—Agincourt, I referred to a nursing announcement. The nurses announcement I was referring to are 900 new nursing positions for the 2011-12 fiscal year. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

It being close to 6 of the clock, the House is adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1754.

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No. 57

N° 57

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

First Session, 40th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 40^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Tuesday 29 May 2012

Mardi 29 mai 2012



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 29 May 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 29 mai 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WIRELESS SERVICES AGREEMENTS ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LES CONVENTIONS DE SERVICES SANS FIL

Ms. Best moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 82, An Act to strengthen consumer protection with respect to consumer agreements relating to wireless services accessed from a cellular phone, smart phone or any other similar mobile device / *Projet de loi 82, Loi visant à mieux protéger les consommateurs en ce qui concerne les conventions de consommation portant sur les services sans fil accessibles au moyen d'un téléphone cellulaire, d'un téléphone intelligent ou de tout autre appareil mobile semblable.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Ms. Best.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member from Sault Ste. Marie today.

It certainly is my privilege to rise today for second reading of the Wireless Services Agreements Act, 2012. This bill has been drafted to protect consumers who enter into wireless services agreements for cellphones, smart phones, tablet computers and other mobile communication devices. Our proposed legislation, if passed, will provide greater transparency and stronger protections for Ontario's consumers and their families when they sign contracts for cellphones and wireless services.

I would like to again thank my colleague Mr. Oraziatti, MPP for Sault Ste. Marie, for introducing Bills 133 and 5, which brought the Legislature's attention to consumer issues respecting wireless services agreements at first instance. Thanks to Mr. Oraziatti's groundwork, several of the concerns I will mention today are already in the minds of members of this House. We must work to ensure that Ontario's consumers are better protected when it comes to wireless services agreements.

Mr. Speaker, in recent years, there has been an explosion in the use of wireless communication devices. The degree of market saturation, at more than 70% of Ontario's population, has turned many people into mobile-

device dependants, using these devices to stay connected in a multitude of ways, instantly. These wireless plans are mostly post-paid, meaning consumers enter into an agreement before using the service and they get their monthly bill after they have used the service.

I'm talking about Ontario families, including parents and their children, grandparents and students in every city and town in this province—texting, talking, making plans, solving emergencies, sending emails. As a society, we have become dependent on our mobile and wireless devices and the benefits that they provide, through the speed of communication and the efficiency they bring to our lives and how we live our lives.

Perhaps it's our growing reliance on these devices, with so many people using them and finding they do not understand the services and plans they have on these devices, that has given rise to what we call cell shock. Cell shock, Madam Speaker, is what happens when consumers open their wireless services bills and receive exorbitant charges they were not expecting. Cell shock is what happens when consumers are not aware that they are using services that will add charges to their bills. Cell shock is what happens when consumers get billed for wireless services they did not receive. And, Madam Speaker, cell shock has resulted in many consumer complaints and concerns about their treatment by wireless services providers.

The Ministry of Consumer Services receives many questions and complaints about cellphones, and since we announced our intention to introduce this proposed legislation, we have heard more and more consumer stories and concerns through Twitter and on Facebook and websites. Last year's report by the federal Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services, the CCTS, documented more complaints about wireless services than it did for all the other types of telecommunication services combined. Although there has not been an official report yet released, CCTS has stated that in the first half of 2011-12, wireless services complaints continue to account for 60% of all complaints they receive.

Madam Speaker, it is time to act. We have a responsibility to Ontario's consumers and their families to ensure that the millions of cellphone agreements signed by Ontario individuals and families each year are clear, comprehensive and easy to understand. We want to help Ontarians make smarter and more informed choices about how they spend their hard-earned dollars.

It is time to act when Ontarians open their wireless services bills and realize they have been charged for services they did not initially agree to. It is time to act

when they have been charged for services they did not know would cost them extra. It is time to act when Ontario consumers open their bills to find they have exceeded their minutes without even knowing it. And, Madam Speaker, it is time to act when consumers find their contracts have been extended without their say-so.

Ontarians need clarity. They need to know what wireless services they are getting for their money. They need to be able to understand their agreement in plain language and what is included with the basic fee and what services would result in higher cost. They need to give their express consent before a fixed-term contract is amended, renewed or extended, and they need to know, when a company advertises its prices, that these prices are all-inclusive and include all costs.

This proposed bill is a big step forward in responding to consumer concerns to the issue of cell shock and to the billing practices of wireless services providers.

Madam Speaker, Ontario's Consumer Protection Act already protects Ontarians from unethical practices such as misrepresentation and billing for unsolicited services. However, more needs to be done in the area of wireless services, and that is precisely the reason we have introduced Bill 82, the Wireless Services Agreements Act, 2012. This proposed legislation complements the Consumer Protection Act and specifically addresses issues unique to wireless services contracts.

Our proposed legislation, if passed, will provide more transparency and stronger protections for Ontario's consumers and their families when they sign wireless and cellphone contracts. It is designed to empower consumers by ensuring they have the information they need to make informed decisions and that they take control of making these decisions. It will help Ontario families and individuals make informed choices about how they spend their hard-earned dollars.

Madam Speaker, this bill, if passed, will help stop cell shock and help strengthen confidence in the marketplace. It will give people more control over all aspects of wireless contracts, from choice of services to fees payable if they cancel—issues that over 70% of Ontarians deal with on a daily basis.

0910

Madam Speaker, wireless services is an \$18-billion industry that pervades all of our lives. The concerns that Ontario consumers have with wireless services contracts have kept pace with, if not surpassed, the growth of the industry to the point where we need to act.

Now I would like to specifically address the benefits of this proposed legislation. Madam Speaker, when we look at provisions in the proposed bill, the benefits to Ontario's consumers are crystal clear. If passed, this bill will allow customers to cancel their agreements at any time with modest cancellation fees. Four other provinces—Quebec, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia—have introduced similar provisions. With a consistent approach across provinces, we can facilitate greater industry compliance, ultimately benefiting the consumer.

Companies will be required to clearly disclose which services are included in the minimum cost of an agreement as well as the added costs that would be charged when additional services are used. The terms must be clear, comprehensive and prominent, and they must include specific information on roaming charges and cellphone locks.

The proposed bill also requires companies to have agreements that use clear language, with full disclosure, so consumers understand what they are agreeing to. This level of disclosure is essential for consumer protection. Customers must understand what they are getting into before and after they sign their agreements.

Companies will need to get a customer's express consent before renewing, extending or amending a fixed-term contract. Contracts will no longer be renewed automatically without the customer's consent. When we look at today's marketplace, we find that simply asking for a change to an agreement can result in the agreement being extended or renewed. This proposed bill states that agreeing to a change in service is not the same as agreeing to an automatic extension or renewal. The customer must be asked if they want to renew, and the customer must clearly indicate yes before this takes place.

Madam Speaker, we are aiming to reduce cell shock by enforcing all-inclusive price advertising, requiring providers to advertise the total of all costs and fees, disclosed most prominently, in any price advertising. If the all-in price is advertised, there can be no surprises when the bill arrives.

This legislation, if passed, will result in stronger and more enforceable remedies, making it an offence for wireless services providers to charge for payments they are not entitled to. If a service provider owes a refund to a customer, the customer has the right to sue the provider to recover the amount owed to them, and they have the right to claim three times the amount of a refund that is owed.

If this bill is passed, it will offer some of the strictest penalties of all the provinces in Canada. This proposed legislation also prohibits billing for services that a customer cannot use. If a wireless device is not working and is still under warranty, the provider cannot charge for services a customer cannot use because the device is being repaired, nor can they charge for a loaner if one is provided. Many consumers object to paying extra for services they did not know would cost them extra if used.

This proposed legislation requires wireless companies to have a system in place to notify customers when they are close to their usage limits so that the customer is aware that further use may result in additional costs. They must also disclose these cost details to the customer before any agreement is signed.

If this bill is passed, implementation of this legislation will include a strategic enforcement approach and a proactive communications plan to ensure that consumers are fully aware of the changes and know their rights.

Madam Speaker, if this bill becomes law, it will take effect a full six months after royal assent. The six-month

implementation period will give companies enough time to prepare their systems to comply with the new legislation.

When it comes into force, if it is passed, the new act will apply to all new agreements. It will also apply to all service contract transactions, like renewals, that may already be in progress. It will also apply to existing contracts that are changed after the date it comes into force, if passed.

We understand that telecommunications is a federal responsibility, while consumer protection is a matter for the provinces. For this reason, the bill focuses exclusively on the consumer aspect of the industry. It focuses on the needs of Ontarians who are considering or who have already signed agreements for wireless cellphone services. The bill, if passed, is designed to protect consumers through clear disclosure requirements and cancellation rights.

Madam Speaker, I can tell you that the government has consulted industry on the development of this bill, and the industry's message was clear: Any government action must be consistent with actions taken by other provinces. We have listened to the industry's message, and this bill has been aligned with similar initiatives in other provinces to avoid a patchwork of regulation across the country. We are taking steps, through this proposed legislation, to help consumers make more informed choices when spending their hard-earned dollars.

Madam Speaker, I will be supporting this bill—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Really?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Yes, really, and I am supporting it because I believe that it contains strong measures that will—

Interjection.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I have to reaffirm, you know.

It contains strong measures that will protect consumers and their families. I am certain that all consumers across Ontario are supportive of this initiative, and I look forward to support from the MPP from Sault Ste. Marie as well, and the support of our government measures, as this proposed legislation is a very notable piece of legislation. We are certainly empowering consumers by ensuring that they get the information they need—wake up over there—to make important decisions. This information will help consumers better understand their mobile and wireless services contracts and get the contracts they want.

Madam Speaker, I ask all members of this Legislature to support this legislation to support Ontario's consumers. Certainly, I look forward to your support.

In concluding, the Ministry of Consumer Services' mandate is to help inform and protect Ontario's consumers, and this bill is designed do just that: help Ontario consumers and their families make smarter, more informed choices about the wireless services they have come to depend on. The Wireless Services Agreements Act, 2012, if passed, will build on our government's commitment to consumer protection, providing more dis-

closure, fairness and confidence in the marketplace. Empowering and protecting consumers in this area is a priority of the Ministry of Consumer Services as we continue to build on the foundation we have laid in protecting consumers across Ontario.

0920

Madam Speaker, taking this strong action is part of the McGuinty government's commitment to educating, protecting and serving Ontarians by ensuring a fair and safe marketplace.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. David Oraziotti: I appreciate the opportunity to discuss this important legislation this morning. There are a couple of issues that I want to put on the record.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Are you supporting it too?

Mr. David Oraziotti: The member opposite wants to know if I'm supporting the legislation—absolutely. And I certainly hope the members opposite will support the legislation because it's very beneficial to consumers.

I want to commend the minister for her comments this morning. She has done an absolutely fantastic job in leading this legislation through to the point we're at today and demonstrating her very public support for this. We think this is great legislation for consumers, long overdue. As you're aware, there are a number of other provinces that are moving forward with this type of legislation.

I do want to go through some of the rationale for the bill, some of the support that has been provided and highlighted publicly, as well as the specific aspects of the legislation that will help to relieve some of the pocket-book pressure that consumers are facing with respect to their wireless service agreements.

Speaker, I think we all have heard from constituents the various horror stories that they have experienced from contracts that they have signed with various cellphone companies across this country. Part of the problem, as we all know, is the very limited competition that exists in this country. In other jurisdictions, competition is broader. Competition brings to bear contracts that are more fair and that offer better prices for consumers. I think part of the challenge here is, with respect to our jurisdictional responsibility, the ability to act on any contract signed in the province of Ontario. We need to take that step.

Clearly, there's a vacuum at the federal level when it comes to a willingness to step up and protect consumers from what are really arbitrary, one-sided contracts that are imposed on consumers. We have a very limited marketplace at the federal level—absolutely. And the wireless telecom industry, which is represented by the CWTA, has their lobbyists who advocate on behalf of the telecom sector and have successfully convinced the federal government, the CRTC, to maintain a fairly limited market space when it comes to the competition in the country. As a result, you have mainly three large telecom companies in this country who have divided up their licences into other various brands, and we're all familiar with those brands. It creates a bit of an illusion of competition

in the marketplace in this country, allowing consumers to believe that they really have this broad-ranging choice, when, in fact, they don't. They're calling the same call centre for their service; they're subject to the same contract.

On that point, Speaker, most consumers unfortunately don't understand the contract and don't know what's in their contract. Now, we can certainly place some responsibility on the consumer to understand what it is they're signing, but when such a large percentage of consumers are unaware of the contract obligations that they have and what is in the contract, it really calls into question what kind of contract they're signing and whether or not we can make those contracts clearer and written in plain language so that the average consumer has a very clear understanding of what their obligations are. Those constituents who come to us who are experiencing cell shock—who open their bill and say, “Wow, I'm paying \$120 this month. When I saw that price that was advertised, it said \$29.99,” or \$49.99. We want to make sure that the highest, most prominent price is the all-in price in any advertising.

Let's talk a little bit about some of the particular aspects of this legislation. First of all, one of the most important things that consumers want addressed is the aspect of cancellation charges and the limitations on those. The companies have contracts for 36 months to purchase a smart phone or an iPhone, whatever it might be. They have you locked in for a fairly lengthy time. The cancellation fees in most other sectors, for most other services, is 30 days' notice, or you cancel immediately and whatever the remaining balance is on the bill, you pay that and you're done. These punitive fees that go on and on and on, month after month—in some cases, we've heard stories of consumers saying, “I had to pay a \$600 cancellation fee,” or “a \$400 cancellation fee.” They are incredibly excessive, and this is the gouging of consumers that we're talking about.

In the legislation, Speaker, what we are clearly proposing is a \$50 cancellation fee. An individual can call up and cancel their contract; they would be subject to a \$50 cancellation fee or 10% of the remaining balance, whichever is less. So the maximum could be \$50. Now, we're obviously not saying that if an individual walks into a store, purchases a smart phone that's \$500 and gets that phone for \$99, that three months later they can cancel and walk away with that hardware or that equipment. That is not the intent of the bill. Obviously, the individual needs to make good for the balance of the cost of the hardware. But with respect to the contract, which is separate, as we say, in most other industry standards and practices, that cancellation fee should be limited or capped. We're proposing \$50 or a maximum 10% of the remaining balance. That addresses the incredible challenge of dealing with cancellation fees in these contracts that are really one-sided.

The second item I want to raise, Speaker, is with respect to automatic renewal and express consent of the consumer. What consumers have told us very clearly is that with respect to their contracts, if they make the

slightest change, if they make a minor change in their contract, they all of a sudden find themselves in another three-year agreement. They might be in their 32nd, 34th, 35th month of their contract, and it may be about to expire, and they change jobs and they need a conference calling feature on their phone or they decide to add one of their children to their plan. So the company will say, “That's great. No problem. We can make that change, and you are now renewed for another 36 months, subject to all of the cancellation fees that we now have put in place.”

Express consent is not really something that is available to consumers. This is an important change. Consumers obviously, as we've said, need to be aware of what's in their contract, but clearly a large percentage of consumers are not. We'll get at that issue as well. But with respect to these automatic renewal efforts that are made by the companies to continue to lock people into this perpetual monthly fee and payment process, we need to stand up for consumers when it comes to these types of contracts.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Sounds like negative-option billing to me.

Mr. David Oraziotti: It certainly does. The member from Peterborough referred to negative-option billing, those types of approaches by companies that disadvantage consumers or that really push the limits of what is acceptable and fair in a contract arrangement.

We also, Speaker, want to see greater disclosure and clarity with respect to the contract, and that has to do with the specific language of the contract: the length of the contract, the complexity of the contract. This is a phone; it shouldn't be a mortgage. The contracts need to be much clearer, much more plain and much more understandable for the average consumer out there, and they simply are not. We want to ensure that the onus is on the service provider to take reasonable efforts to make sure that the customer knows what they are paying for and what they are getting in return.

We also want to make sure that all optional and all mandatory services included in the contractual arrangement are provided up front: mandatory services like 911 emergency access fees, sometimes called the “government fee”—Michael Janigan made an interesting comment about that—typically a charge of 50 to 75 cents a month, called the “government regulatory recovery fee”; the optional services, things like voicemail, call display, any of those optional services and the charges for those services; as well as any one-time fees, such as an initiation fee or activation fee or other set-up fees. Those all need to be clearly disclosed to the consumer so we get that all-in start-up price and avoid the sticker shock or the cell shock that consumers are presently facing. Agreements need to be in clear and plain language, and anything that costs extra needs to be identified. We've broken some of those down, as well as things like long distance rate plans and any of those additional charges.

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If a phone is provided for free, or at a discount, the agreement must also include the retail value of the phone

at the time of the purchase for consumers so that they understand very clearly, if they were to terminate that contract, what the additional cost would be to purchase the balance of the hardware, that actual phone. That needs to be provided up front so there are no surprises later on. The same would apply to any discounts or any promotional prices; they would be made clear—for example, free early-evening calling, but it's only free early-evening calling for six months and then after six months, guess what, there's a new price.

So these measures that are in these contracts and the fine print, this is getting at disclosing some of the strategies that are used by companies to drive up the cost of cellphones in the province of Ontario. We need to be clear that it is important to disclose those costs. Contracts need to be written and presented in such a way that the consumer understands what they're signing and certainly what their responsibilities are.

Let's talk a little bit about advertising for cellphone plans, because this is another important aspect that has been included in the bill. The idea here is certainly to ensure that the advertising and promotional material that is out there, that is being marketed to consumers, includes the total and complete prices. So the supplier needs to ensure that the advertisement also contains a prominent statement of the total cost to consumers, on a monthly or periodic basis, of all services to be provided in the agreement.

So if it's \$29.99, if it's \$49.99, what does that include? What's extra? What's additional? What are you going to get charged for later? What are the start-up fees? What fees are going to change after 90 days, when you're outside of that store and you're at home and you are on that phone, so when you get your bill you're aware that that's going to be the case? For example, a supplier could not exclusively advertise \$20 social networking if that product and price are only part of a service bundle. They would have to disclose that information, and they would be obliged to convey the true monthly cost of the plan included in that particular feature.

There are many ways of marketing, and those marketing experts that are alive and well in the telecom sector are doing their utmost to promote their product and also promote ways in which consumers will sign up for and purchase their phones long-term. It's important that we make sure there's full disclosure and, again, transparency to ensure consumers are aware of what they're getting.

Prohibiting providers from charging consumers for services while devices are under warranty and are being repaired: We think this is an important aspect with respect to this service. At present, a consumer may purchase a fairly expensive phone, or perhaps a not-so-expensive phone, but the reality is that, generally speaking, for the first year it's under warranty. So if there's a malfunction of that phone, not of the consumer's doing—you didn't leave it out in the rain on the picnic table—and you bring it back to the provider and it is in fact something that is technologically wrong with the phone from the provider, at present, the company can continue to send you a bill

every month although you might not have the use of your phone. Now, in some cases the store, the company, could decide to give you a loaner phone, a replacement of like or similar comparison for you to use in the meantime, and in that way you would still have access to your service and they could still send you your bill. I think most people would agree that that would be fair and reasonable.

However, the customer service agents who deal with consumers and are part of these companies are educated in when and when not to provide these particular products for consumers, and not in all cases will an individual receive the opportunity to have a phone and could still be billed. So we want to make it crystal clear in the legislation that if you surrender your phone to your provider and there is something wrong with the phone—it's not working properly—you cannot be billed by the company for that period of time for which you do not have use of that phone. We think that's an important aspect of the legislation.

We also want to ensure that suppliers are giving notice to consumers who are about to incur additional charges for various services that are part of their phones. We're talking about voice, data and texting plans, the components that make up the charges on your cellphone. There are ways for companies to do this and to ensure that this is taking place. Some companies have made efforts to ensure that individuals can go online and they can check their monthly usage; they're able to kind of monitor that. It's not the most convenient thing when you're out, but there are some efforts being made in that regard. That's positive. The efforts that companies can make to send a message to the consumer that they're about to exceed their limits is helpful, and it will get at that bill shock. It also would be good business practice, because it will reduce the level of consumer complaints, the level of concern expressed by consumers about the charges that are being incurred.

This issue was raised as well—the issue around roaming charges and dealing with roaming charges outside of the particular home jurisdiction. There are some concerns with respect to this because, for example, if you take your phone and you are in another jurisdiction—let's say you're in the US and you're on a US network. It's difficult to compel your provider here in Canada to inform you of the charges you're incurring because you're roaming. They might tell you that you're out of your jurisdiction, and after that you're on your own.

Everyone, I think, has heard stories about individuals who expressed concern about those very, very significant roaming charges. Those are costs borne by you as the consumer for using the communications towers and equipment of another provider. Obviously, we cannot provide somewhere in the legislation for that requirement to be made. However, within our jurisdiction we can certainly do that, and when you leave the jurisdiction you can certainly get notices that indicate that, "You're now roaming, and here is the charge and here are the fees." Some of that is happening. We want to make sure that all

companies are abiding by this. That's the reason for putting it in the legislation.

Just on that point, Speaker, I should highlight that some companies have indicated to us quite clearly that they are taking some of these steps and that this legislation is, in fact, unnecessary. What I would say to that, Speaker, is that if the companies are taking these steps, then they won't mind if this legislation is passed to support consumers, because they're already doing that. So let's be clear that not all companies are following what is in this proposed legislation. We need to make sure that they are. For those companies that are showing some leadership on this in working to protect consumers, that's great; they're going to be ahead of the curve and ready when changes come about.

As part of a remedy in the legislation, we've proposed the right to triple recovery. There are instances where individuals have the right to recover funds or fees that have been charged to them. Companies have not always been as co-operative and as understanding as they could be, and, frankly, as fair with consumers as they need to be. So if there's a breach in the act and there's overcharging of consumers, we're going to make it mandatory within the legislation that the consumer will have the right to recover damages three times what has been charged or what they're seeking. We think that's an effective tool for consumer protection. We think it gives consumers the ability to rightly recover fees that have been unfairly charged to them.

It also accounts for, quite frankly, their hassle, their inconvenience, their time of having to deal with this issue and this matter. You know what happens when you don't pay your cellphone bill on time. You know the way the companies treat you. You know what happens to your fees, your interest charges, the notices you get, and the like. We think it's fair and reasonable that consumers be offered in legislation some ability to have similar remedies at their disposal as well.

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I just want to highlight a couple of the relevant reasons and examples as to why the measures that are provided in the legislation are absolutely necessary. In a recent study, a 2010 study of the New America Foundation—

Mr. Jeff Leal: That's a good one.

Mr. David Oraziatti: To the member from Peterborough, it's great. The New America Foundation (2010) took a look at the three components of your cellphone bill, so voice, data, text, those components that make up your cellphone bill, and took a look at Canada, Denmark, Finland, Hong Kong, India, Japan, South Korea, Sweden, Taiwan, the US and the UK; a pretty good cross-section, comparison of communities, a pretty good—

Mr. Jeff Leal: A comprehensive study.

Mr. David Oraziatti: —a comprehensive study, pretty thoughtful, and a broad range of countries included in this. Out of the 11 countries surveyed in this study, take a guess which country had the highest charges for voice, data and text, out of 11 countries?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Canada.

Mr. David Oraziatti: Absolutely. The member from Peterborough says "Canada." That is absolutely right.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Passed the test.

Mr. David Oraziatti: And not by a little bit; we're not just marginally above other jurisdictions when it comes to these costs. We are substantially higher than other jurisdictions. So we certainly feel that there are measures which are contained in the bill, Speaker, that we believe need to be passed immediately to help support consumers.

This is important research. It gives us a bit of a barometer in terms of what's taking place in other jurisdictions, and we think it's important to move forward on this.

I also want to reference a couple of organizations that have stepped forward. The Public Interest Advocacy Centre, in a report by Michael Janigan, highlights the practice of extra charges in the Canadian telecommunications industry whereby suppliers of consumer products and services segregate part of their cost as a separate charge and add them into the final price. He describes the system access fees levied by the wireless companies as "charges concocted by the wireless companies to appear as a government-mandated fee."

The Consumers Council of Canada in 2010 reported the most prevalent consumer complaints relating to wireless plans, including complaints about access fees, charges for incoming text messaging, the availability of call detail records, billing inaccuracies, expiry policies, prepaid wireless cards, hidden fees and contract termination rules. The examples, and the sector, are really calling for changes—certainly those individuals that are interested in acting on behalf of consumers.

In Europe in 2010, the wireless service providers were required to implement a mechanism to protect consumers from high roaming charges while travelling to other EU countries and travelling abroad. We think there are a number of other important measures that have been taken by other jurisdictions that would benefit consumers here.

In October 2010, the US Federal Communications Commission, the FCC, proposed that wireless carriers be required to notify users by text or voicemail if they're about to go over their allotted monthly voice minutes, data or texting. So, clearly, there are other jurisdictions that are leading on this, and there are companies, as I say, that are taking similar action, which is helpful.

Here's specifically what Michael Janigan said, the executive director and general counsel for the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, somebody who has built a career in consumer protection, someone who has stood up for consumers on a wide array of measures and legislation: "This bill will help remove barriers to real competition for ordinary consumers of wireless services." And he said, "It will help level the playing field for customers who currently feel trapped by ... one-sided conditions." That's important; I think it speaks volumes.

Mel Fruitman, who's the vice-president of the Consumers' Association of Canada—here's what he said: "For a long time consumers have been victims of the nefarious marketing practices of wireless telephone com-

panies. This protection for consumers is necessary and long overdue. We can see no reason why this act would not receive all-party support and be quickly passed.” That’s Mel Fruitman, Consumers’ Association of Canada.

Don Mercer, who is the president of the Consumers Council of Canada—here’s what Mr. Mercer said: “Contracts for cellular voice and data services and equipment rate as top-10 sources of consumer complaints in Ontario. Many consumers feel their rights are unfairly limited and find it hard to understand their responsibilities under these agreements. Quebec has exercised its authority for contracts in this area. Now this bill in Ontario proposes action as well. Provinces across Canada should take responsibility and prompt action, and ultimately work toward a nationally harmonized approach that recognizes today’s consumers are highly mobile.”

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Strong action.

Mr. David Oraziatti: The member from Northumberland says, “Strong action.” I totally agree. He’s on the mark.

“The Consumers Council of Canada encourages members of the Ontario Legislature to seriously engage this bill as a practical measure.” That’s Don Mercer from the Consumers Council of Canada.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Any relation to Rick Mercer?

Mr. David Oraziatti: I don’t believe so.

Ric Borski, president and CEO of the Better Business Bureau, midwestern Canada and central Ontario region—here’s what Mr. Borski said: “The Better Business Bureau ... has received more complaints about cellular phone services and supplies in Canada during 2010 than any other issue. The BBB supports in principle any provisions that enhance marketplace transparency and promote better business practices.”

Speaker, I think it’s quite clear from the steps that are proposed in the legislation that they seek to address what I have as part of the communication that I’m receiving from thousands of individuals across the province of Ontario, who have sent us correspondence with various remarks and complaints and suggestions on how to make the cellphone and telecom industry and the contracts that are signed in the province of Ontario better.

I want to also commend Tom Harrington, CBC Marketplace. He has done an absolutely fantastic job highlighting the issues in the cellphone industry. He had a special on this—this was some time ago—“Canada’s Worst Cellphone Bill.” In the program, he highlighted the specific contractual arrangements by the companies that are designed to drive revenue, keep people in their contracts—that are not clear enough, that are not balanced enough. There was such uptake in that program and such a positive response to hearing more about that that he followed it up with another program, and “Canada’s Worst Cellphone Bill, the Sequel,” aired as well on CBC. So Mr. Harrington has done a good job of raising awareness.

A number of other organizations, as I’ve highlighted, have raised the issue. Speaker, I think it speaks volumes

to the height of awareness in the sector on this issue. With roughly seven million cellphone consumers in the province of Ontario, our government is going to clearly stand on the side of those consumers and say, “We want change; we need change.”

I want to speak just briefly about the environment in which we find ourselves in this sector, because we all know what’s in the bill. We’ve read the bill. We’re clear with the provisions in the bill—and I should add, there’s one other item in here: that there’s regulatory power for unlocking. In some jurisdictions around the world, you can’t sell a cellphone if it’s locked. In Canada, the phones are sold locked, and you can’t take that phone to another provider even if they have the same technology where you could use that technology and that phone. As you know, there are different networks—GSM, CDMA—and the companies have these phones locked. So now they’re proposing that they’ll unlock the phone, but—guess what?—it’s going to cost you 50 bucks to unlock the phone. It’s just another way to gouge consumers, another way to find a mechanism to charge you. There is a provision in the legislation that would allow the regulatory power to deal with unlocking, and we certainly support that and are certainly pleased with it.

Getting back to the environment around which we find ourselves—because, again, we’re all clear with what’s in the legislation; we know what steps we’re taking or proposing to take to protect consumers. The point is—and I will hear from the opposition shortly on this, and they may say that this needs to be done at the federal level, because telecom is federal jurisdiction. Granted, and I would prefer not to see a patchwork of provincial legislation. However, that being said, I would suggest that we not sit back and not act in the absence of waiting for the federal government to impose regulations to address this matter. This is far too important to millions of people in the province of Ontario.

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Quite frankly, we start to hear now, “Oh, we’ll review our voluntary code of conduct.” That’s what we’ve got. We’ve got the Canadian Wireless Telecom Association, represented by Bernard Lord, who basically is lobbying the CRTC to keep the licensing spectrum narrow, to maintain this monopolistic-type environment, to not broaden the competition. The reality is that we’re being proactive on this issue, and some people would say, “Hey, it’s been way too long.” They’d say, “Hardly proactive.” They’d say, “What have you been doing? Look at what’s been going on in the sector.”

For some people to say, “Hang on, you don’t need to do this. This is something you don’t need to act on. We’ll get at it. We’ll up the standards on our voluntary code of conduct”—hogwash, right? Absolutely unlikely. They will not do anything unless we step up and legislate on this matter with respect to contracts.

Now, where are we going with this? Well, we may see other provinces—Quebec, as of 2010, has legislation, the first province in the country to put in place legislation to address some of the challenges, the contract renewal

issues, the cancellation fees. Their legislation in Quebec, to be clear, is similar in many ways, but it is not as comprehensive as what is being proposed here today. Manitoba is tracking toward implementing legislation, and we're hearing that Newfoundland is in the process as well.

So, clearly, Canadian jurisdictions, Canadian provinces, are seized with this issue, in part because of the tremendous feedback they're getting from consumers complaining about these issues and the contracts, that it is imperative, it is crucial, for the provinces to step up and, within their constitutional, jurisdictional authority to regulate contracts in the province, to say that, quite frankly, we're not going to take it anymore, and we need to make sure that these contracts are fair and balanced and we're standing up for the consumers.

I would encourage and I would welcome any effort made by the federal government to pass legislation that would help to protect consumers in this regard, and there are companies out there that I believe would enter the marketplace, that would help to create a fair playing field, fair prices for consumers, and deal with what we see in these studies comparing Canada to other jurisdictions being so out of whack on this. We need better and fairer pricing in this sector in this country.

We talk about the infrastructure that goes in to paying for this. Consumers are paying for it dearly—absolutely—and while we have massive geography and a relatively smaller population in comparison to some other jurisdictions, I would suggest that the population in this country is relatively focused in certain areas. They say roughly 80% of the people in this country live within 200 miles of the US border. We have major metropolitan areas in other provinces that make up large percentages of their provinces, so the argument that we need to charge higher rates, that the geography is so massive, and we have a smaller population—I don't buy that. I also don't buy the punitive measures that are in this legislation.

So while some of the opposition members may say that we need to go further—I'm certainly prepared to hear and entertain those comments and those concerns that are raised—I think the proposed legislation that's on the table here makes great strides. It's the most comprehensive in the country, I would suggest, and so if there are suggestions from members opposite in terms of how we can improve this legislation, by all means.

Concerns that have been raised by the sector: I want to just address this briefly. The concerns that have been raised by the sector, things like, "Well, this will add to the bureaucratic, contractual complexities of the contract in the sector. And as a result of you doing this and passing legislation, with the mind that passing legislation must mean more regulations"—when in fact we're talking about reducing costs, and we can give some examples about how those changes are completely legislatively and bureaucratically neutral when it comes to adding to the paperwork and the pressures that companies might want to hide behind. Because the companies will say, "The

province of Ontario wants to wade into this on a contractual issue. They want to pass additional legislation. That's going to create a regulatory burden, and we're going to have to find a way to gouge the consumers some more to pay for this kind of legislation." You know what? That is absolutely garbage.

So just to be clear, right now, if in the contract it says that your cancellation fee is going to equal \$400, and we change that contract to say that it's going to be 50 bucks as a maximum, can someone please tell me how that's going to add to the regulatory burden for consumers? That's the kind of argument that is being put forward by companies who suggest that we're going to somehow add to the regulatory burden and it's going to be too complex. We're talking about simplifying these contracts. We're talking about plain language. We're talking about contracts that are more fair and more balanced. We're not talking about additional regulatory burden that they want to hide behind to find a way to gouge consumers some more. That's just really not on. These are contracts that are—what we're proposing would be easy to comply to.

The reality is, the companies, frankly, don't like it because they want to be able to find ways to charge consumers more. When we compare to other jurisdictions, there's no reason why consumers need to be charged more. They're being charged more than their fair share right now. Companies will charge as much as the market will bear. Right now, with the protections offered to them with the federal arrangement, with the lack of interest by the federal government to open this up and to start issuing more licences to create a more competitive environment by which consumers can sign these contracts, consumers will continue to be gouged.

So our choice is clear. We can stand by; we can watch as consumers face these contracts and get these horrendous bills. We can sit on our hands. We can do nothing. We can say, "This is federal responsibility. Telecom is all in the jurisdiction of the federal government, and there is no aspect whatsoever of anything signed in the province of Ontario that consumers face that is in any way part of provincial jurisdiction. It's all federal. Let them deal with it. If they're going to just allow companies to continue to charge people these rates, so be it."

Well, on this side of the House, we don't think that's right. We don't think that's fair.

Mr. Jeff Leal: We have a different view.

Mr. David Orazietti: We have a different view. I don't want to say a different view, necessarily, from the opposition, because I do want to acknowledge that on two previous occasions, Bills 133 and Bill 5, two private member's bills I introduced to do this, support came from the opposition, so I want to recognize the support of both the NDP members that spoke in favour of the legislation and supported it on second reading debate and also members in the Conservative caucus who stood up in this Legislature, spoke in favour of it and supported this. As I think it's something that's common to all of us—I think basic protection for consumers, when it comes to matters like this, they cross party lines. They're an issue that we

can all get behind and we can all support, certainly when we see such glaringly obvious issues in the sector.

Again, we've got a choice. We've got an opportunity here where we can either sit back and—you know, not all provinces have decided to act. There's only one province in this country today that has stepped up and said, "We think we need to offer more protection for consumers because of the lack of competition at the federal level and the unwillingness to open up the marketplace to allow this competition to see fairer contracts, better prices, and prices that compare to many other jurisdictions around the world." That's really what we're looking for. So the solution to this, aside from legislation, is doing that. If the federal government chooses to do that, that's great, that's fantastic. We welcome that. We'd like to see more companies in the market.

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We heard the other day—we were at the Standing Committee on General Government. The NDP has an insurance review. We're looking at that; all parties are concerned about that as well. A fiscal representative, Phil Howell, came to the committee, and he said, "There are 100 insurance companies in the province of Ontario, and we want to make sure there's a robust sector so that it offers consumers better value and more competition."

Mr. Jeff Leal: Choice.

Mr. David Oraziatti: Choice is good in the marketplace. It's the polar opposite in the telecom sector, right? You've got these telecom giants that create these subsidiary brands that create this illusion of competition that really doesn't exist.

Back to the point: We've got a choice. We can either sit back, we can sit on our hands, we can ignore this issue; we can deny that this is happening to consumers who continue to walk into our offices. We all know that. Everybody here has had somebody talk to them about that, and the examples are horrendous. Or we can take some action. We can decide that we're going to be a leader in this country on this issue. We're going to step up. We're going to do the right thing and we are going to exercise within the Constitution our jurisdictional ability to protect consumers with respect to these unfair contracts. I implore all members of this Legislature to support what is a very progressive piece of legislation, a forward-thinking piece of legislation, legislation that offers support to consumers, much-needed relief, long-overdue relief for consumers, levelling the playing field, creating a more fair and balanced practice. We want to work with those companies, but we need some cooperation, and right now, it's all one-sided. For the companies that are moving forward and taking these steps, great. For those that aren't, we've got news for you.

We want to see this passed as soon as possible because things need to change in this sector. So I want to encourage all members in the Legislature today to support this legislation. We think it's responsible legislation. It's the right thing to do. We know that there are other jurisdictions that are watching Ontario, that are taking a look at what Ontario is doing on this, and I have every faith in

them that they will step up for consumers in their province as well. If that's what it takes to get some action, to bring the prices down to get fairness for consumers, that's what we want to see. I want all members to support the legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments.

Mr. Jim McDonell: We've been looking forward to this bill for some time. The cellular industry in Canada is an important industry and very popular. It has really taken off in the last number of years, but there needs to be some regulation. We were hoping that the federal government would do it because there's no question that the larger the extent that it's done, the better for the consumer. We want to make sure that we aren't putting regulations in that will actually drive up costs.

We are a different market. Here, as compared to Europe, our population in this country per square mile is a fraction of what it is in these larger jurisdictions, so one would expect costs to be up. But we're looking for the best deal we can get for consumers. I think that in the absence of what we are seeing on the federal side, there needs to be some intervention. There needs to be some review through the committee to compare it with some of our other provinces that have gone before us. Quebec and Manitoba in particular had two bills before us, so we can look at and review and look at the merits of what they've done and the results. As I say, the last thing we want to do is to put in restrictions that will only drive up costs or put conditions in place that, in the end, negatively affect the public.

As we know, the youth of this country are really absorbing the cell coverage and the cellphone options, and we only know that it's evolved so fast that it's hard to call it evolution. So now it's time to look at it and take a chance and make sure that we do this right and, as well, look to our federal government in Ottawa to make sure that they follow through, because overall, the best plan is a national plan.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd just like to stand and say that we're happy to support this bill. I also would like to commend the member from Sault Ste. Marie for bringing this forward. It's an important issue, and we're certainly very happy that people are going to be protected under the Consumer Protection Act, but this isn't the only category that government should be looking at. They should be looking at hydro. They should be looking at heat. There are all kinds of other areas where there are these hidden charges that people are really paying through the nose, so to speak. This is a good start, but there's lots more to do, because I think if we can get into these hidden charges in a lot of these categories, we're going to save the consumer and the public a lot of money.

I'm hoping, when it gets to second reading and it goes to committee, that the government will finally listen to some of the opposition members when they bring good points forth to committee, because in the last five years,

frankly, I haven't had any amendments—maybe half an amendment out of the hundreds we've put in—that have even been entertained by the government. So I'm hoping under this minority government that they realize that we have an important role to play when it comes to committee and they'll listen to what we actually say and actually do something and add amendments, because there are a lot of good suggestions that come from this side that go under the carpet because of political games. That's unfortunate because I certainly believe that we have a lot to add to this conversation, and I certainly have been exposed to these charges over the years, whether it's hydro, heat, insurance, you name it. There are a lot of charges that—people are, frankly, being milked in this province. We probably pay some of the highest situations in the whole country.

So I'm hoping that this bill does go forward, and I hope that we can certainly put some good recommendations in there, Madam Speaker, because I think it's a good way to go.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Today, I think we heard very informative and detailed speeches from the Minister of Consumer Services and, of course, the member for Sault Ste. Marie, who has long been an advocate for consumers right across this province—if you look at his history since he has been here, since 2003—bringing forward a number of bills that provide for consumer protection.

I know the member for Sault Ste. Marie always asks himself this key question every day: What have you done for the little guy lately? This piece of legislation does a lot for the little guy, because in these two speeches this morning—he certainly lifted the veil of secrecy that has surrounded the oligopoly that many of these cellphone providers and wireless operators have provided far too long in the province of Ontario.

You know, Madam Speaker, we've seen a tremendous shift over the last decade. Traditionally in Ontario, people relied upon land lines for one of their major means of communication with others. But we've had this evolution, some would say a revolution, over the last decade, where people are using iPods, cellphones and other sophisticated telecommunications devices.

This morning, the minister and the member for Sault Ste. Marie have certainly highlighted areas where the public really needs to be protected. This negative-option billing, these hidden charges and these roaming charges really is gouging.

This is a very important piece of legislation. It's part of the consumer protection initiative that we've had in several other areas. We dealt with people going door to door with natural gas contracts for home heating, people going door to door with electricity contracts. This is a great bill that should be passed right away.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to make a short comment on Bill 82 this morning.

I will give credit to the member for Sault Ste. Marie. This has been an issue that he has been very interested in. We were both elected in 2003. He has certainly been an advocate for doing something with respect to cellphone billings and clarifying and putting some clarity into the contracts. So I do support him on that.

I hope that, maybe if this bill passes, we'll be able to take a closer look at some of those cellphone bills down at that Ornge air ambulance service. If we get a select committee on Ornge, we'll be able to take a closer look at it, because I'm sure that those cellphone bills down there are about as out of whack as everything else was. I see the House leader here, and I would hope that he would give us that select committee on Ornge that they've been promising for so long.

But I digress, Speaker, and I do want to speak to the bill for a moment. The world has changed so dramatically. I mean, I can recall when the phone in our house was one that you had to crank to get the operator up in the old Bell house up where the library is in Barry's Bay now, and she'd come on the line and ask who you wanted to talk to. Our number was 126 at home, and you would have to then say who you wanted to talk to, but you didn't dial up. We never got dial telephones in Barry's Bay until 1967.

Hon. John Milloy: Were you born then?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yeah, I was born then. I was a veteran by then.

The world has changed. Everybody has got a cellphone today. For some people, that's the only phone they have. They don't even have a home phone anymore. So it's pretty ubiquitous. Everybody has got one, and I think it is time to maybe take a look at some of the rules and regulations surrounding them and clarifying the billing, because there are too many people—they think everything is going along hunky-dory, and at the end of the month, they get a bill and they say, "Oh, my word, where did this come from? This is unbelievable." It is time—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

The member for Sault Ste. Marie has two minutes to respond.

Mr. David Oraziatti: Just to wrap up, I appreciate the comments from members opposite and take to heart those concerns around the committee process. I'm certainly looking forward to the committee process. I think it will be very enlightening to see some of the folks who will come forward, who we'll have the opportunity to ask questions of during presentations. Obviously, we'll consider suggestions that could be made by the opposition or amendments that could be proposed to this legislation, anything that could strengthen this that we have the jurisdictional ability—and I use that caveat because there are probably some other things that people want to see done, but that there are some jurisdictional issues with, in moving forward.

I certainly want to see this bill made as strong as we could possibly make it and ensure that there is a balance. We're not looking to negatively disadvantage those busi-

nesses in the sector, but quite frankly, the industry has got a problem and—the word was used, but yes—the industry needs an intervention, big time. This is a challenge.

When you take a look at the emails and the correspondence from citizens across this province and you look at the issues that they're raising, and you compare the rates and the services that are provided in a litany of other jurisdictions for those components that make up your cellphone bill—the voice, data and texting components—it's quite clear that we are being overcharged and consumers are being gouged in this province.

We can make these contracts better, we can make them clearer and we can make them more fair. There are other areas that I think we can look at as well when it comes to consumer protection measures, and I'm certainly supportive of doing that. But with respect to Bill 82, this is an important piece of legislation. It is legislation that is leading in the country, because there's only one jurisdiction that has this type of measure. I want to encourage all members to support it. Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. This House stands recessed until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

WEARING OF CARNATIONS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Nickel Belt on a point of order.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe we have unanimous consent for every member of this House to wear a red carnation in honour of Multiple Sclerosis Day at Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member has asked for unanimous consent. Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm pleased to welcome to the Legislature today the following members, who are at Queen's Park for Niagara Week: Gary Burroughs, regional chair of Niagara; Brian McMullan, mayor, city of St. Catharines; Brian Baty, regional councillor, Pelham; Tim Rigby, regional councillor, St. Catharines; Bruce Timms, regional councillor, St. Catharines; Dave Lepp, regional councillor, town of Niagara-on-the-Lake; Mike Trojan, CAO, Niagara region; Ken Brothers, commissioner, public works; Katherine Chislett, commissioner, community services; Patrick Robson, commissioner, planning; Matt Robinson, chief of staff, regional chair's office.

We welcome you to Queen's Park and invite everybody to go to the best reception that's held each time each year, and that is the Niagara reception, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., rooms 228 and 230.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today my daughter Linda Milligan's class

from Percy Centennial Public School, of Warkworth, Ontario.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to introduce representatives from the MS Society who have come to visit a number of us at Queen's Park. I have Mrs. Susan Latter, Mrs. Deanna Groetzinger, and a good friend of mine, Laurel Ireland. In your gallery, Mr. Speaker, we also have Sharon Segal, who is lucky enough to be in your gallery. Thank you, and welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I'd like to join my colleagues in welcoming a number of people from the MS Society, but in particular, Gaby Mammone, who's from my riding. Welcome, and thank you for coming.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome the grades 7 to 10 classes from Pathfinder Christian School in Wallenstein, who are visiting Queen's Park today and sitting in the gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to introduce Sinead Anderson. Sinead originally comes from Napanee, attends the University of Ottawa and has worked in my community office for the last couple of years. Sinead, welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I want to recognize a special guest here from Beamsville today. I'm very proud that Anthonie Korstanje is one of the pages in this session of the Legislature. Anthonie is joined today by his father, Joe Korstanje, and his brother Josh in the members' gallery. Welcome here from Beamsville today.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am absolutely delighted to welcome, in the Speaker's gallery, Mr. Joe Bush and his students from Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic school. This is an annual event, and we're delighted to have Mr. Bush and his students here with us again.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to welcome members of the MS Society from Durham: Mike Roche, Fanuel Ephraim and Gaby Mammone.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I'd like to introduce members of the board and executive leadership team from the Cement Association of Canada, here with us today in the east members' gallery: President Michael McSweeney, Erik Madsen, Bob Cartmel, Bill Galloway, Francesco Carantani, Adam Hayashi, Steve Morrissey and Gary Molchan.

Also, I'd like to invite all members to attend their Cement Mixer reception, beginning at 5 o'clock in the legislative dining room.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'd like to welcome two of my constituents, Marilyn Wooldridge and her daughter Timber Wooldridge. They're here today to observe the proceedings in question period.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Firgrove Public School sits in the middle of my wonderful area of Jane and Finch, and I have the pleasure today of welcoming teachers, parents and grade 8s, and I wish them a wonderful stay at Queen's Park and a wonderful tour. I want to wish them a welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to also welcome members from the cement industry, from St Marys specifically: Martin Vroegh, and John Vanderpas, the senior vice-president. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just wanted to introduce two interns who are working with me this summer: Jordan Lazarus, in my aboriginal affairs office, and Nick Wall, in my municipal affairs and housing office.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I just want to introduce Jevan Punia, who will be joining us in the Legislature shortly. She'll be serving as my intern and comes from the wonderful riding of Brampton—Springdale.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I would like to introduce, from St. Thomas, Cathy Topping from the MS Society in St. Thomas. Welcome, Cathy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): In the members' gallery, we have Coreen Chisholm, from the riding of Don Valley East, to see her daughter, page Dana, in action. We welcome you to Queen's Park.

In the Speaker's gallery, from the great riding of Brant, we have with us today Lisa Bishop, a Rotarian; Nancy Lasko, a Rotarian; and all the way from New Zealand, 17-year-old Rotary International exchange student Leigh Bathgate, who is here visiting us. Thank you for joining us.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As you can see, it's full, so I've got a couple of more.

We have with us in the Speaker's gallery the parliamentary interns from the Quebec National Assembly. Please join me in warmly welcoming Marie-Joëlle Carboneau, Olivier Côté, François Gagnon, André-Yanne Parent and Ludovic Soucisse, here today to visit us and visit the interns here. Welcome.

We also have in the gallery today Her Holiness Amma Karunamayi, who has been recognized internationally for her commitment to providing welfare programs to underprivileged people living in India. Welcome.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would like at this time to ask our pages to assemble for their introduction. Our new pages are here.

From Mississauga—Erindale, Sherry Aslam; from Prince Edward—Hastings, Alexander Bossio; from Haldimand—Norfolk, Annaleise Carr; from Don Valley East, Dana Chisholm; from Parkdale—High Park, Kyra Colbert; from Richmond Hill, Angela Feng; from Timiskaming—Cochrane, Daxime Genier; from Don Valley West, Stavroula Georgiadis; from Scarborough—Rouge River, Tameem Hassan; from Kitchener—Conestoga, Andrew Hutton; from Kitchener Centre, Andrew Johnson; from Pickering—Scarborough East, Rumesa Khan; from Niagara West—Glanbrook, Anthonie Korstanje; from Oakville, Mateo Molinaro; from Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Katie Mowat; from York South—Weston, Gopi Patel; from Scarborough Southwest, Tameem Quader; from London North Centre, Kendra Squire; from Kitchener—Waterloo, Sam Sun; from Sarnia—Lambton, Hannah Symington; from York—Simcoe, Louis Vattré; and from Peterborough, Colin Walsh.

Applause.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Last week, I had the chance to visit British Columbia and Alberta, well-managed western provinces. What I heard, interestingly, was that they want to see Ontario succeed, but they know from their own experience that in order to do so, you need to get your own fiscal house in order. I repeatedly heard the view, from businesses and political leaders out west, that when Ontario succeeds, all of Canada does well, by leveraging off all of our strengths and weaknesses. But they want to see Ontario turn its economy around—the same theme I hear from families and business in Ontario, a theme that we share as Conservatives: to turn our province around and start by getting our fiscal house in order.

1040

Will the minister do what British Columbia did and bring in a mandatory across-the-board public sector wage freeze to get our fiscal house in order?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Actually, Mr. Speaker, British Columbia has now had to deal with court rulings with respect to their actions that bring into question their ability to implement.

We are in fact moving forward with a good plan. Although I've not had a chance to meet with the new Premier of Alberta or the new finance minister, I've had the opportunity in the past. I've met with the Premier of British Columbia and the finance minister there. Like governments around the world, they are having some success. They have challenges as well. We welcome their success because all of our provinces doing well makes a better country.

The economy of Ontario: They're absolutely right. It is the leading economy. It's about a strong country. It's got strong leadership on this side of the House. It's building a better future, and we'll have a chance to talk more about that in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to hear the minister say that they now want to see the west succeed because certainly Premier McGuinty had jumped on the bandwagon with the federal NDP leader, Thomas Mulcair, in running down the west.

We disagree, Speaker. We want to see a proud, confident, prosperous province of Ontario that is astride Confederation, creating jobs and investment. We don't want to engage in the politics of envy of the Ontario Liberal Party. We want to see a strong, confident Ontario that's leading Canada again.

The minister mentioned Finance Minister Kevin Falcon, whom I met with when I was in Vancouver. He said to me that BC wants to see a strong Ontario, but this means Ontario must get its fiscal house in order, and that means a credible plan to get its budget back into balance.

British Columbia did so: a public sector wage freeze for all; no exceptions, no special deals. That, in Ontario,

would save us \$2 billion per annum. My colleague from London—Middlesex, Mr. Yurek, has brought forward a private member's bill to do just that. I salute him. Will you support this initiative?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: No. I wish, though, that the Leader of the Opposition, as he's singing the praises of British Columbia and Alberta, would stop slagging Ontario and the people in this province.

Let me just remind him that Ontario, in the last two months, is now leading Canada in employment growth. Since October 2003, 547,000 net new jobs. Just last week, the expansion of Highway 407 east: 900 direct jobs—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I don't expect any noises when I stand, and I would ask that I be able to hear the answer.

Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Cliffs Natural Resources investment of more than \$3.3 billion and 1,100 jobs, Mr. Speaker—this province is a leader in Confederation. It has been, it continues to be and it will lead in the future under the strong leadership of Premier Dalton McGuinty and this government, as we move back to balance and protect the investments we've made in health and education to ensure a better future for all of our children.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplement—ary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I think, Speaker, with respect to the finance minister, what he said is not in keeping with the facts. This much-promised Ring of Fire project hasn't happened, because the government keeps getting in the way.

We're proud of the province of Ontario. We believe that better days are ahead of us. Ontario PCs want to make us a leader again, not a laggard in Confederation.

So what happened? They took an historic strength of affordable energy and turned it on its head to the highest energy costs now for business in Canada and soon North America. They increased taxes, and they plan to do that again. They brought in the biggest deficits in the history of the province, heading towards tripling the debt in our province.

That is the wrong approach. We reject it. We want to see a pro-jobs, pro-growth agenda, to move beyond BC, to move beyond Alberta. We want Ontario to be the leader again in Confederation, and that starts with a mandatory public sector wage freeze. The bill is on Thursday. We're behind it. Won't you get behind it and save the taxpayers \$2 billion each and every year?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The Leader of the Opposition neglected to mention that we've now had 6.4% growth over the last 10 quarters since the recession, which is very strong, given our particular circumstances. One welcomes the success of our western provinces; they're oil-rich, natural gas-rich, potash rich, and it's good to see them succeeding, Mr. Speaker. It's good to have a country that's growing.

As we address the challenges in this economy, we think it's important to invest in post-secondary education to have the best workforce in the country. The census numbers today pointed to the fact that Ontario's economy again is growing, our population is growing. Even though we have challenges with aging, Mr. Speaker, this is still a magnet for people from all over the world, not just here in the GTA but right across Ontario. That's the strength of this economy, Mr. Speaker. That's the future, a future that's in good hands with Premier Dalton McGuinty and his government.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the finance minister and his Pollyanna view of the economy in Ontario. Sir, we've been behind in job creation and unemployment for 65 consecutive months. We've had a higher unemployment rate than the national rate. That has never happened in the history of Canada, never happened in the history of the Confederation. That's not the kind of Ontario we want to see. We want to see an Ontario that leads Canada again—the best place to find a job and to start a business.

It's very unfortunate when Premier McGuinty has quotes like the following: "I think we need to find a way to help western Canada move beyond an economy that is overwhelmingly based on pulling stuff out of the ground. That's causing harm to our collective future." The arrogance of that statement is breathtaking. It shows a Premier who is dramatically out of touch with real-world economics, and it's frightening how it echoes the far left and M. Mulcair from the federal NDP.

We see a different view. Instead of the politics of envy, we want to see the politics of confidence in Ontario; lower, more affordable energy and an understanding that oil sands jobs also create jobs in the province of Ontario. But first, make us open for investment. Make us strong and make us confident. Lower taxes in the province and get these books back into balance. Don't you agree, Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: All right, so let's talk about where Ontario leads, because the Leader of the Opposition, while he's out promoting Alberta and British Columbia, ought to be thinking about promoting Ontario and Ontario jobs. Mr. Speaker, for the eighth year in a row, the largest auto sector in North America, and this government helped keep it on its feet, right here in Ontario; the fastest clean energy sector in Canada; our financial services sector has gone from 13th-largest to 10th-largest in the world. We're proud of our investments. I'm proud to be on that panel. I'm proud the Premier led the effort to do that.

We are now ranked as the favourite destination for foreign investment in North America, second only to California. Our biotech, information, communications technology and film industries are in the top three in North America.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, KPMG ranks Ontario fourth in business costs among nine mature economy countries.

That's a record to be proud of. This is a province to be proud of—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

I'm going to offer all members a recommendation and advice again: When I say, "Thank you," that means you've used up your time to either answer or ask a question.

Supplementary: Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm certainly proud of the province of Ontario, but I'm not proud of what this government has done to it—higher taxes, unaffordable energy.

Let me drag the finance minister back to the real world here. Over the last five years, over 215,000 people have actually moved from Ontario to BC, Alberta and Saskatchewan—215,000 men and women who couldn't find jobs in the province of Ontario who had to move out west.

And the minister touts his Green Energy Act. One business leader in British Columbia said the following about the Green Energy Act. He said it was the most "bizarre, crazy, and possibly the worst piece of public policy in Canadian history." That has been a disaster.

Minister, it is time to take a different path, one of lower taxes, flexible labour markets and controlling government spending, beginning with a public sector wage freeze for all of us. Better days are yet to come in the province of Ontario, but if we get the fiscal policies right. Get our fundamentals right, like these good Conservative policies, to make Ontario a leader again.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Well, I prefer the Premier of Ontario to the Premier of British Columbia any day, and I take his word, Mr. Speaker.

1050

And I'll tell the Leader of the Opposition, you are denigrating Ontario. You're running it down. You've been running it down in New York, in Alberta and British Columbia. Stand up and speak positively about the growth in our economy. Start speaking positively about our auto sector, our banks, our financial institutions. Start telling the complete story about net immigration to Ontario. We know you opposed certain tax credits in the last election. We'll be bringing—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will now start identifying individuals. As I said yesterday, I thought we would be able to get a little further into this.

Deputy Premier?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: You don't even welcome new immigration to Ontario. When we bring forward the tax credit that you spoke so passionately against, we'll see where you stand on that, because new Canadians, new immigration, are helping to build this economy, to grow

it. It's part of our vibrant future that's being well led by the Premier of Ontario with a strong plan to get us back to balance, and protect our schools and health care as we move forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the minister: The sad reality is that new Canadians are increasingly choosing BC and Alberta and Saskatchewan, and Ontario is falling behind. They're joining the 215,000 women and men who have left Ontario to find work somewhere else.

The finance minister is bankrupting our province, and he wants to talk about who is running Ontario down. The McGuinty government is running Ontario down: more than half a million unemployed, record deficits and debt, uncontrolled spending, trailing the country in job creation, three downgrades to our credit rating, and 65 consecutive months with higher unemployment.

Surely there is a better path, one based on lower taxes, affordable, reliable energy, a modern apprenticeship system to create jobs in the skilled trades, and getting our books in balance. That's the path the PCs see, a path to prosperity, a better Ontario, to bring those folks back from BC, Alberta, back home to Ontario—an Ontario that leads Canada again.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Can we assume on both sides that you're going to applaud after everyone and then not do it? Thank you.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I suppose the Leader of the Opposition is going to find potash, oil and natural gas somewhere in Ontario. He is completely inaccurate in his portrayal of Ontario. Those provinces have growing economies resulting from a natural resource abundance.

But let's talk about our natural resource abundance, Mr. Speaker. I spoke of the Ring of Fire. Let's look at some new operations that are coming online: Rainy River Resources, a gold mine in Kenora, a potential to create 1,200 jobs—600 construction, 600 full time; Rubicon Minerals in Kenora-Rainy River; the Goldcorp Bruce Channel gold deposit. The list goes on and on.

The Leader of the Opposition may choose to run down Ontario. We choose to build a better future. Some 42% of new Canadians land right here in Ontario, and we're going to welcome them with tax credits that that leader and his party oppose. This is the party of the future, with a bright future—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: —for Ontario and a strong economy with good schools, good health care and—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Simcoe North come to order.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: —a balanced budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question?

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. Yesterday, the Minister of Finance dismissed concerns that were raised in a legal brief about the government's 300-page omnibus bill. Does this government have an independent legal opinion of their own to back their interpretation of the bill?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, I didn't agree with the legal opinion that was put forward. The characterization that the leader of the third party brings with respect to the budget bill is not accurate. In fact, most of it deals directly with ServiceOntario. About a third of the entire budget deals with ServiceOntario alone.

In fact, if you take that portion out—and it's an important portion, which, again, we signalled in the 2010 budget; we studied and moved forward on. If you take that out, it's one of the smaller budget bills. The schedules are dealing with relatively routine matters and when one looks at the history of budget bills over time, in fact it's relatively small.

Mr. Speaker, we are moving forward on that budget. It's the right plan for Ontario's future. It's about getting back to balance and it's about keeping the investments in health and education that have made our system—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Yesterday, the minister didn't dispute that the bill in fact handed cabinet, and the Minister of Finance in particular, broad new powers. The government claims that these powers are not going to be used for a fire sale, Speaker, so what exactly do they need these powers for?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, first of all, there's not one schedule in the budget bill that isn't referenced directly in the budget itself. Perhaps they didn't see that between the time they were briefed on March 28 and the time they reached an agreement with us on April 23.

Again, this House passed a motion that approved the budgetary policy of the government of Ontario. We're moving forward on that. We incorporated close to \$1 billion in changes resulting from the agreement that we had reached with the leader of the third party. The budget is the right course of action that will get us back to balance as we protect the important investments we've made in health care and education.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, I don't recall getting an answer to my question. All I did was ask what these broad new powers are for. What does the Minister of Finance want these broad new powers for?

Ontario's Ombudsman has also raised concerns about provisions in this bill and says the bill creates oversight erosion and allows for new Ornge-like organizations operating outside of public scrutiny. Can we get the names today of the agencies that will be enforcing government legislation outside of public scrutiny?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To characterize this as being less public scrutiny is factually wrong, Mr. Speaker, number one. Number two, we have a bill before the House today that deals specifically with Ornge. We would like to get it passed, Mr. Speaker. It deals with enhanced accountability.

This is the government that brought freedom of information and privacy legislation to bear on the hydro agencies, which the previous government had kept hidden in a—didn't want to be seen, for obvious reasons. It became known afterwards.

The addendum to this year's budget is one of the most far-reaching and transparent documents, new initiatives in the budget that identify line by line where money and program savings are coming from. It was borrowed from—I know they like to quote the Obama administration. It was taken right from the Obama administration's budget documents, Mr. Speaker.

So it's about transparency; it's about accountability; it's about getting back to balance and, most importantly, protecting the investments we have made in health and education, for a better future for all Ontarians.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Acting Premier. Serious concerns are being raised about a bill that seems to give the minister and the government a lot of new powers to make decisions that affect people's lives behind closed doors. And instead of answering basic questions, we get a lot of the same old tired politics from across the way. People deserve better in this province, Speaker. Can the minister explain, straight and clear, why he needs the sweeping powers the omnibus bill gives him and what he intends to do with those powers?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I would urge the leader of the third party to review the advice she has had from her loan guarantors and would just refer her to sections in the act that deal specifically with a number of things. Services under the proposed act would be provided in accordance with service agreements. Significant conditions and restrictions are imposed in the following way: appointment of auditors for a non-share corporation; of minister-issued policies and directives to the board in a non-share corporation; significant powers over a corporation's ability to establish, acquire, wind up, dispose or otherwise deal with a subsidiary, a partnership, a trust or any other entity; and to impose accountability and performance requirements on a service provider and requirements to submit to inspections, reviews and audits by the minister or a delegate, Mr. Speaker.

The act also would impose on a service provider the provisions of Ontario's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act regarding collection, retention, use and disclosure of personal information.

It is, in fact, accountable. It is sweeping in its accountability. Your interpretation is wrong. You ought to sit down with your loan guarantors and get it—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, the problem is that all the of this stuff that he just quoted can be done by ministers and their delegates, not done in the accountability of this Legislature, which is the problem.

Over the last three months, the people of Ontario have seen first-hand what happens when we ignore oversight and accountability. The waste and mismanagement at Ornge happened because this government decided that public scrutiny was not important.

I think that if the people of Ontario and if the members of this Legislature saw memos like the one that was revealed yesterday, our ambulance service might not be in the mess that it's in today, Speaker.

If the minister says he doesn't want another Ornge, is he willing to admit that his 300-page omnibus bill needs some changes?

1100

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we have said, right from the beginning, we welcome amendments to the bill, as long as it protects the substance of the motion that was passed by the Legislature. We would like to get the bill into hearings. I know the government House leader is working diligently to do that. I believe we've tabled a time allocation motion that provides significant public hearings on the budget, and we would welcome amendments to make the budget bill better.

But make no mistake, we are simply moving forward in a way that we've always moved forward. In fact, this bill provides much greater accountability than has existed up to now, not just for agencies of the government, but also for any future arrangements that may or not be made with private sector delivery of services that are presently delivered publicly.

We welcome getting this bill to committee, getting it passed, and would likely accept amendments to the substance of the bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The people who make this province work every day expect their government to spend public money wisely. They understand that they live in tough times and that we all live in tough times, but they also see that shortcuts like Ornge don't save money. They do the exact opposite.

Is the minister ready to look at changes to his omnibus bill that will ensure proper oversight, transparency and accountability?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We have those provisions built into the bill. If the leader of the third party has ways of enhancing that, yes. If, in fact, she's saying that there's no opportunity for further outsourcing and so on, no, we don't agree with that, because, frankly, a number of government services are not efficiently delivered. And so we look forward to enhancing the accountability provisions in the bill. We hope that we can get agreement to move the bill to committee and to get the budget bill passed.

So to the leader of the third party and her loan guarantors, I say, yes, indeed, we will look at those amendments. But make no mistake, this is the right plan for

Ontario's future. You agreed to it last month. You ought to keep your word to the people of Ontario.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Health. Yesterday, we revealed that the Premier and his cabinet approved the Mazza scheme against the advice and warnings of senior civil servants. The minister in her response said this: "It's clear that with the benefit of hindsight we would have had a stronger performance agreement."

Speaker, what's clear is that even hindsight can't help this minister to get it right. Given the alarming number of calls to which Ornge has not been able to respond because of down-staffing and unqualified staff being available, one would have thought that the most important change to the performance agreement would be to entrench clearly defined service levels in that agreement to which Ornge could be held.

Speaker, I'd like to know from the minister, why is there no reference in that performance agreement to specific service levels to which Ornge would be held accountable?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: There are significant changes under way at Ornge, and we are absolutely committed to strengthening oversight at Ornge and to improve the quality of care that patients are receiving. One of the ways we're doing that is by collecting information that was not previously collected on a range of issues.

I'm very pleased that Bruce Farr has joined the leadership team at Ornge. He has a long history working with Toronto EMS. He started as an ambulance driver in Scarborough. He moved to the training division and was eventually promoted to the position of chief and general manager. He retired from that position and is now in a leadership role at Ornge. His experience in providing strategic direction, operational planning and leadership will prove indispensable. We look forward to continuing to strengthen—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew is now warned. To be clear, the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke is warned.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, repeatedly in this place we've heard from the minister that the new performance agreement will set standards. She now—the minister—has refused to respond to my very specific question about levels of service that should be defined in that performance agreement. I quite frankly don't care how many new people are there; I want to know what the minister is doing about incorporating levels of service into the performance agreement to which Ornge can be held. Speaker, there are none. I'd like to know from the minister why not.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member from Halton, come to order.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, I never tire of reminding the member that a committee of this Legislature, the public accounts committee, is seized with this matter, and if he insists upon holding hearings on the floor of the Legislature, as I said, there are a variety of issues that we want to talk about on this side. For example, why did Ornge locate its headquarters in Oshawa instead of Peterborough, against the advice of senior Ornge executives, when we find out that there was lobbying on the part of the Conservatives? We will ask about Kelly Mitchell and the work he did in terms of lobbying the Progressive Conservative Party, putting together—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

LOBBYISTS

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais diriger ma question au premier ministre par intérim. Last week, the Integrity Commissioner called for a series of changes to the Lobbyists Registration Act in light of the scandal at Ornge. Her first recommendation is that her office be given investigative power and the power to issue penalties. Would the Deputy Premier agree to make these changes?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We take all of these issues very seriously. I'm proud of our record in bringing enhanced accountability to this government and to all public services. We will look at those carefully and give them due consideration over time.

I'm proud of the fact that we have enhanced the coverage of freedom of information and privacy, that we have made efforts to improve the sunshine list and a number of other things. There's always more to do and we welcome thoughtful input to these important pieces of legislation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you for the answer, but by the actions of the party on the other side, it looks like they're worried that those new powers will reveal too much about their government relationship with well-connected insiders. Through Ornge—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Peterborough, come to order.

M^{me} France Gélinas: —we now all know that the former president of the Liberal Party of Canada, Alfred Apps, and the Premier's close adviser and campaign manager, Don Guy, say they were not lobbying, although we now have an ever-growing body of evidence that suggests that Mr. Apps was setting up meetings with the Premier's office, that Mr. Guy was making calls on behalf of Ornge.

We need to know the truth, Mr. Speaker, and if the law was broken, there should be a penalty. Will the Deputy Premier agree to fix the Lobbyists Registration

Act so that the registrar can investigate and put a penalty on people who break the law?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Government Services.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: As the member knows, the Integrity Commissioner is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly. I have met with her and she has made some recommendations. We are looking at it very carefully, and we will evaluate those recommendations and then we will proceed accordingly.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the Minister of Government Services. Ontarians want high value for their government services. They expect those services will be delivered in a way that fits their lifestyle. Since 2006, about 13 million Ontario residents have used the new ServiceOntario for a variety of services: birth certificates, marriage certificates, health cards, driver's licences, licence plate renewals, even fishing and hunting licences.

ServiceOntario has made a lot of improvements in their conscious effort to go "green," but, Minister, what are you doing now to make ServiceOntario even easier to use for Ontarians?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I agree with the member from Willowdale completely, and I want to thank him for asking this question. We have made continuous and significant progress on how to deliver government services. We are now offering Ontarians even more choices. Now they have the option of signing up for getting e-notification reminders for renewals of their driver and vehicle licences. This is a very simple and environmentally friendly process. They can sign up by creating their own account at serviceontario.ca. This will make our notification process faster and can save our government up to \$8 million.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: Minister, I know you're trying to get ServiceOntario to drive more and more traffic online. In fact, constituents up in Willowdale are very happy that ServiceOntario is expanding the services online—from 37 health-card-issuing offices to almost 300 across the province.

There are a lot of positive changes. There are nine different new service guarantees, and now we're moving in this direction with the e-notification.

I know that other jurisdictions have been experimenting with this new e-notification application, but, Minister, what are your plans? Are we going to expand this e-notification? How's it working out in Ontario? How's it working out in other jurisdictions?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: The email notification process will be optional and was unofficially launched for real testing on March 12, 2012. Since then, approximately 10,000 Ontarians have already registered on email notification. Many enhancements that were identi-

fied during the user acceptance testing will also be implemented.

ServiceOntario is continuing to expand and enhance its online services in order to give Ontarians greater choices. This new service offering is designed to help busy families access government services around the clock, and their reminders will not be misplaced.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I want to say it will save the government up to \$8 million. Some 6.5 million vehicle stickers and 1.5 million driver licences are renewed annually, and we are working very closely with the—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: Back to the Minister of Health: The most critical issue at Ornge is the fact that lives have been put at risk because of Ornge's inability to respond. In the vast majority of cases, the reason for that is understaffing of qualified paramedics and pilots.

There was a time in Ontario when Ontarians could count on their air ambulance service to respond to both critical, advanced and primary care responses. Essentially, the fact that there is no reference in the performance agreement to either critical care response or advanced care response reduces our air ambulance to a very expensive medical limousine service. Is this the minister's new vision of our air ambulance service?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would urge the member opposite to actually read the performance agreement. I would urge the member opposite to support Bill 50, legislation before this House that will enhance transparency and oversight at Ornge.

The new performance agreement will give Ontarians better air ambulance care. It appoints a new patient advocate, publicly posting the complaints process. There will be annual public surveys on performance. The member opposite wants performance indicators; so do we. They're in the performance agreement. There will be improved reporting of emergency dispatch information, and we will be including cancelled and declined flights and land ambulance calls.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: These are all important enhancements to Ornge, and I really wish the member opposite would just support Bill 50.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Well, Speaker, you have called for an answer, I'm expecting an answer, and we're not getting an answer to my question.

Not only is there no reference in that performance agreement to critical and advanced standards of care, I have it on good authority that Mr. McKelvie, the minister's new CEO, has in fact now asked the ministry to water down the regulations governing paramedic qualifications. He is asking for regulations to reduce the requirement of having two paramedics down to one para-

medic to qualify for an air ambulance staff. This contradicts even Ornge's internal medical advisory committee.

Rather than demanding compliance with existing standards, the minister is now going to be complicit in actually compromising patient care. I'd like to know from the minister, why will she not, at least in this case, take the advice of her emergency health services branch, which is advising against watering down that regulation, and stand up for patient care—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, rather than dealing with hypotheticals, which the member opposite has become famous for doing, I think it's important that we deal with the facts. The fact is, the members opposite are blocking passage of Bill 50. It is shameful.

Meanwhile, the front-line staff at Ornge are saving lives every single day. Just yesterday, the front-line staff at Ornge had one rotor-scene patient, 36 inter-facility transfers; 15 patients were transported by land ambulance, and 10 pediatric patients were transferred by Ornge.

The member opposite wants to criticize, criticize, criticize. Speaker, I think it's time that the member opposite stood up and said thank you to the front-line staff at Ornge.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. New Democrats sought access to documents about why your ministry decided to sell Ontario Northland without a single word to northerners. Instead of getting information, we got pages and pages that were censored and blacked out. Minister, what are you and your government hiding from northerners?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Absolutely nothing. What we did was, in 2003, when we assumed power, we decided that we would be as creative as possible to try to make the ONTC sustainable. So what we did over the course of the next eight years was invest \$436 million in the ONTC to try to make it sustainable, to try to make it viable, to try to ensure that it would meet the present and future needs of northern Ontario. Unfortunately, we realized that with a \$100-million subsidy every year, this was not sustainable. The business lines are good; the business model isn't. We're looking for a new business model.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Speaker, with all due respect: Ornge—that was creative.

Minister, the censored documents date back to March 2009, well before the ONTC shops in North Bay lost the Metrolinx refurbishment contract. While this government was preparing to axe Ontario Northland, the minister was on hand in Sudbury to cut the ribbon on a new Ontario Northland Sudbury bus terminal. And while this govern-

ment was consulting northerners on the northern growth plan, the fate of the ONR was already being decided.

Once again, Minister, why are you withholding information that impacts over 1,000 jobs across the north?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The reality is, that's the farthest thing from the truth. The facts have been laid on the table. The ONTC is not sustainable in its present form. The ONTC lines are good business lines. The ONTC business model is not a good business model.

Now, the NDP might think that you can sustain a \$100-million subsidy to the ONTC over the next 2,000 years. The reality is, you can't. So what we're doing is building a transportation system that will meet the present and future needs and that will not be dependent on government sustaining it to the tune of \$100 million plus, every single year.

FOREST FIRES

Mr. Jeff Leal: This morning, my question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, last week we saw how dangerous northern Ontario can be, despite its enduring beauty. The city of Timmins and Kirkland Lake declared a state of emergency when over 800 residents were asked to leave their homes. Tens of thousands more were put on high alert as large forest fires spread quickly throughout this region.

I know that the safety and well-being of Ontarians is a significant concern to our government. Even though steady rain and calm winds have brought some relief to the situation in the northeast, it is my understanding that communities are still on notice.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister share with this House the efforts of all those who have worked tirelessly to protect those people in northeastern Ontario?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I do want to thank the member from Peterborough for that very important question. Our thoughts have certainly been with the families and all those impacted by the major forest fires in northeastern Ontario this past week, particularly those in Kirkland Lake and Timmins.

I did get an opportunity to speak with Mayor Enouy of Kirkland Lake and Mayor Laughren in Timmins last week also and assured them that the safety and well-being of Ontarians is our number one priority, and we will continue to use all our resources to fight those fires.

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Certainly, I know that they are very grateful, as we are, to the 1,300 firefighters and many more first responders who are standing on the front-lines aggressively battling the blaze, working long, hard hours to keep families safe. I think we have to thank the other provinces as well for bringing in their resources and their equipment to help us fight this major forest fire challenge.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I want to salute the minister for his great leadership in this particular situation. My supplementary is again to the Minister of Natural Resources. Thank you for the update on the status of these forest

fires in northeastern Ontario. As stated earlier, 800 residents were forced to leave their homes due to the threat of forest fires. In these challenging and demanding times, it's necessary that impacted communities are receiving adequate and timely information. They need to know when they are being evacuated, when they will be received and what their exit route is. To the Minister of Natural Resources: Can you tell me how this pertinent information is being communicated, and what is the status of the evacuated communities?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First, I want to thank all government resources, other provinces and the Red Cross, which have contributed to either our fire suppression or evacuation effort. Good communication is vital to such a challenging event. EMO has been holding teleconferences every day with affected municipalities, First Nations and other levels of government. Communication to local residents is being handled locally in the affected communities. The municipalities and police services have reached out to local media and contacted potential evacuees directly door-to-door and by phone. In addition, EMO is disseminating emergency information via a social media channel and website.

Thankfully, weather conditions fell in our favour over the weekend, and the majority of evacuees have returned home. The safety of our citizens is paramount.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Minister of Health. Minister, you will be familiar with the case of Liam Reid, who is a two-and-a-half-year-old boy diagnosed with an extremely rare eye condition known as bilateral PFVS/Norrie's. Without surgical intervention and treatment, most children with this condition are completely blind by the age of four.

In 2009, Liam's ophthalmologist completed a prior approval application for out-of-country coverage so that Liam could be treated by a leading expert in Michigan, Dr. Michael Trese. Despite the fact that there's no one in Ontario who is able to treat Liam and save his sight, his application for coverage has been denied. Minister, will you ensure that Liam receives the treatment he needs in order to preserve the little sight that he has left in his eyes?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the first thing I, of course, want to do is acknowledge that this is a very, very difficult case, and my thoughts are with the family and this little boy who is facing a significant challenge. I cannot, of course, comment on any specific cases, but I can say that we have a very robust out-of-country plan. We are bringing more services home. Bariatric surgery, for example, is being performed in Ontario now; it was not, prior to changes we've made. What I can tell you, Speaker, is that there is a process to get funding for out-of-country care, and I urge the family to continue with that process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Minister, there is a patent unfairness here of which you are fully aware, given the voluminous correspondence that I've sent you on this subject. It has come to our attention that there is another child in Ontario who has the very same condition, who has been treated by the very same physician in Michigan for a number of years, who has received approval for out-of-country funding. If this is the case, there is absolutely no justification for the refusal of the ministry to approve treatment for Liam out of country.

This decision, Minister, as you know, means the difference between partial sight and total blindness for this child. Surely that's what our health care system exists for: to treat children like this. Minister, will you do the right thing and grant approval for Liam's treatment?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, these cases are very, very difficult. What I can tell you is, we have a very strong process in place where experts make decisions. It is not appropriate that politicians make decisions. I simply must rely on expert advice.

When there are doctors here in Ontario who can perform services, that work must be done—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Halton, a second warning.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —so again, my heart breaks for this child, for other people who are facing significant health challenges—

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: How many do I get?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No more.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —but we must have care provided in Ontario when that care is available in Ontario.

FIRE SAFETY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Yesterday, the Premier suggested that consultation is needed before requiring automatic sprinklers. The experts disagree with the Premier and the minister. This has been studied, literally, to death.

The experts already agree with four recent inquests calling for this. The Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs, the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, the Firefighters Association of Ontario, the National Fire Protection Association and the former Ontario fire marshal have all called for this legislation.

Why is the Premier and his government the only one standing in the way of bringing forward legislation to require automatic sprinkler systems in every Ontario retirement home—not a year from now, now.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, one death due to a fire is one too many. This minister here takes her job very seriously. I've been consulting with all the experts, including the fire marshal's office and the chief firefighter of the province, and we are actually looking to speed up the consultation. As the Premier said yesterday,

it's very important to have it right, because a consultation on the state of our residences in Ontario—long-term-care residences and homes for special needs—we know how many we have, but we don't know in what condition they are, so this technical consultation came from the experts. We need this technical consultation and they're all with us—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: —to pursue this consultation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Well, Minister, they disagree with you. It's done. The consultations are done. The experts say move now.

You want to move quickly? Move Bill 54 forward, my bill. It has everything in it. The experts consulted with me. I've talked to all the experts.

This is another stall tactic. There's nothing to prevent this government from moving on automatic sprinklers legislation now while continuing their talks with the experts. But the experts have already told me that there's nothing more to say. Let's get on with it. Let's protect lives. You say you care about lives. Then put Bill 54 through and protect lives now, not a year from now when someone else will die.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I understand the passion of the member of the opposition and that's his job to do that. My job as minister is to make sure that we do it right, that we do it with our partners.

We have done a lot—all parties across the way have been in power and what have they done? Nothing. This minister is taking her job seriously. We're working with our partners and we will continue to—we need to know with the previous—Ontario is committed to working with its partners.

With the previous fire safety consultation completed, we have asked the Ontario fire marshal to conduct a technical consultation to identify fire safety improvements in residences.

One size does not fit all. What they're proposing will close a lot of these residences in rural communities and in the north. So we have to have it right and we will do it.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the minister responsible for women's issues. Sexual violence crosses all social boundaries, affects women of every age and cultural background and has devastating impacts on the lives of victims and their families. One third of all women in Canada have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16 and over 93% of reported adult sexual assault victims are female.

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Our government has delivered on its commitment to protect women from all forms of sexual violence through Ontario's sexual violence action plan, but breaking down language barriers for survivors of sexual assault is a key factor in ensuring that women have better access to the support networks that they need.

I ask the minister: What is being done across the province to ensure that survivors of sexual assault have access to social, health care and legal services in their own languages?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I thank the member from Oak Ridges–Markham for the opportunity to speak about an issue that's very important to me, as I know it is for her.

With the launch of Ontario's sexual violence action plan in March 2011, our government reaffirmed its commitment to prevent sexual violence, improve services for victims and strengthen the criminal justice system. The action included \$15 million in investments over four years in public education, training and community services, and \$3 million to Ontario sexual assault centres to help them better respond to women in their communities.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to let you know that the work continues. Just last week, I announced investments of \$4 million to expand the language interpreter services program to serve sexual violence victims whose first language is not English or French. The program will help women in more than 70 languages. It will also include sign language interpretation for victims; 7,000 women will be supported.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Breaking down language barriers for survivors of sexual assault is vital to ensuring that women can access the support they need. May is sexual violence prevention month, so this is a great time to speak about the thousand more of women a year who will benefit from this new investment to expand language interpreter services.

But it is vital that, in addition to providing support to victims of sexual violence, we also work to prevent sexual violence from occurring. I ask the minister: What is this government doing to prevent sexual assault and sexual violence from occurring in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: The member from Oak Ridges–Markham is absolutely right: Prevention is key. That's why we work in collaboration and have worked with our partners, including the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres and Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes, for the development of prevention public education materials and the rollout of a province-wide training for front-line service providers in the community health, education and justice sectors. We're also supporting public education campaigns to encourage men and boys to play an active role in preventing violence against women.

We work closely with our partners right across the province. We are pleased to have taken a collaborative approach and to have their support in the launch of the sexual violence action plan and the work that we have done and continue to do to prevent sexual violence in this province.

SKILLED TRADES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, we're

all aware of the 1,000% increase your College of Trades is proposing to impose upon the journeymen and tradespeople for their certificate of qualification renewal fees. We know that you are embarrassed and humiliated to respond to such an outrageous tax grab, and now you might care to not respond to three new job-killing tax grabs. The College of Trades is proposing yearly new taxes on apprentices, trade workers and all the employers of skilled trade workers. And you know what? They don't even advertise that in their \$4-million ad campaign that they're running in the major newspapers—paid for by the province, by the taxpayers of Ontario.

These tradespeople already pay taxes and there is absolutely no need or benefit in belonging to the College of Trades. Can you explain to the House why you support these outrageous new job-killing tax increases, and why you allow four million scarce tax dollars to be spent on the College of Trades ads?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The College of Trades will probably have, if established, the lowest fees for any college, I think, if you compare it to any other craft, trade, or profession, many of which are \$500, \$1,000 to support these. This actually raises the standards of training and safety dramatically. It is a college of, and run by, people who work in the trades and the business associated with the trades. The member opposite's former colleague Ron Johnson is leading an extensive consultation, not an ad campaign, to survey that in a very democratic process, so that we will ask people to decide what kind of fee is appropriate and what kind of services they want. And maybe later I can sit down with the member over a cup of coffee and explain the difference between a licence and a College of Trades, because there's a difference between buying an apple and a bushel and he doesn't understand the difference.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd rather you just scrapped the College of Trades. I don't need the cup of coffee.

Again, you ducked the question. The people of Ontario are slowly learning that the College of Trades is a huge boondoggle. Minister, you've instituted this large, unnecessary body without consulting with Ontario's skilled trades workers or employers. We know that your college needs a minimum of \$31 million a year to service itself. They're going to get \$15 million of that, Mr. Speaker, from the electrical system.

Now you've decided, instead of taking financial responsibility for your growing boondoggle, you are now going to implement a new tax—and this is what it is; a new tax—on the backs of hard-working tradespeople and their employers all across our great province.

A Tim Hudak government will scrap the Working Families Coalition College of Trades. Will you support the tradespeople of Ontario and scrap this banana republic agency once and for all?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: If that's the member decaffeinated, I can only imagine what he's like when he's caffeinated.

I have to ask for the member opposite to table a simple document with our ministry, which is the fictional 200,000 apprenticeships. I actually have travelled the entire province, and everyone refers to this as a joke. You have been asked now by business leaders and trades leaders to table your plan for 200,000 apprenticeships.

Let me tell the truth: There is no plan. What it would result in is what we had when they were in power, which was 15,000 apprenticeships compared to over 30,000 per year; half as many people in apprenticeships and trades; the loss of the capacity in the system; and we trailed Canada. That's what you're proposing, sir, and that's what you continue to stand by. One day, you should rise in the House and apologize to all—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Minister of Education. Jonathan Lowry is a six-year-old autistic boy living in Hamilton Mountain. After years of struggling to get the help he needs, Jonathan was enrolled in a partnership program between the school board and Hamilton Health Sciences. Jonathan has been responding very well to the treatment in this program. However, Jonathan's family has recently been told that the educational portion of the program at the Chedoke site will no longer be available due to the lack of funding from the Ministry of Education.

Can the minister lay out the rationale for cutting this program when it will lead to much greater costs down the road?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very proud of the work that we have done in this province to provide better support for children with autism. Working in co-operation between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, we have seen significant new investments in communities across the province, and I know well the work that is done in Hamilton.

Obviously, Speaker, I don't have the facts of this particular case. I would certainly encourage the family to speak to their local board, to understand the decisions. I, too, would look for an opportunity to speak directly with the family and understand what is transpiring.

But certainly, what I can say is that when we came into office in 2003, we had a province where children's services were cut off at the age of six, Speaker. We made that change. We've significantly increased the investments, and we should be very proud of a broad range of services that we have for children with autism in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: Back to the Minister of Education: Jonathan receives IBI therapy as part of the programming, and it's working out really well. The cut of the Ministry of Education will put him back into a regular classroom one day a week, an atmosphere which has resulted in regular suspensions of a six-year-old child. It

will also mean that his transportation to and from the IBI program at Chedoke for the other four days will be jeopardized.

Mr. Speaker, this makes no sense. This child is in danger of losing effective IBI treatment and the appropriate education supports so that the government will find minimal savings. Will the minister look into this program to find a solution that places the needs of families ahead of short-term savings?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services, Speaker.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: As well, I'm not aware of the specifics of this individual case, but I will say that I would be pleased to look into it, along with the Minister of Education.

I want to reiterate just how many improvements have been made, including last year's investment of \$25 million annually for ABA treatment to provide opportunities for children and youth who are living with autism so that they can meet their full potential, and of course the quadrupling of our funding towards IBI services in this province since 2003, which has resulted in more than a tripling of the provision of IBI services to children across this province.

Of course, there's more work to be done, and I would be happy to speak to my critic to follow up on this specific case.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

The member from Leeds–Grenville on a point of order.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you, Speaker. In the question period just prior to constituency week when I asked the Minister of Agriculture about the improper grant to the municipality of Bluewater, he inferred it was a rural economic development program grant. In fact, according to agreements, the money doesn't seem to come from any official program—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not a point of order.

I have two quick points. Number one, the farmers' market outside would love to have you there to show support—buy Ontario. I'm taking over from Steve Peters.

Number two, a member has returned from this break that we've had, and we offer our congratulations. If not friend, at least colleague Madame Meilleur got married. Congratulations. Welcome to the club.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1142 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today Mr. John Phair, a well-known agricultural reporter for the Voice of the Farmer from southwestern Ontario. He's here to cover the famous farmers' market

today and also the Ontario Cattlemen's barbecue on the lawn tomorrow.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Introductions?

I'm not sure if the member from Algoma-Manitoulin is—okay, then I will move to the member from Huron-Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to welcome to Queen's Park today the Zurich Public School. They'll be joining us in the gallery in a few moments.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions? Okay, the member is not standing anymore.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

JIM KILGOUR

Mr. Jim Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a man who will be sadly missed in the community of Collingwood. Jim Kilgour will be remembered fondly by the hundreds of students who passed through the doors of Collingwood Collegiate and into his much-loved biology class.

No matter who you talk to, everybody agrees: Jim Kilgour was the real deal. For more than 30 years, he made science fun, often using his wit to engage his students, and never lacking enthusiasm. As my constituency assistant, Joy Parks, told me, "He was one of those teachers that really stood out. From dissecting worms and frogs to watching a classmate drink water while standing on his head, we laughed and laughed."

He was also a devoted community leader, who was made a companion of the Order of Collingwood, the town's highest honour. As chair of Collingwood's waterfront harbourlands committee and leisure services advisory board, he oversaw the creation of Millennium Park and helped preserve Collingwood's rich shipbuilding heritage with the creation of the Walk of History.

Having joined the Collingwood Yacht Club in 1975, Jim served as commodore of the club in 1980, editor of its newspaper and organizer for the sailing competition of the Georgian Bay club. He also taught a marine radio course for more than 36 years.

For me, it was his genuine and fervent resolve to save the Nottawasaga lighthouse that caught my eye, for which he was tremendously successful.

Mr. Speaker, Jim Kilgour was a man who was very generous with his time, a man who put his students and his community ahead of himself, and for that, we are truly grateful. Jim will be greatly missed.

FOREST FIREFIGHTING

Mr. Gilles Bisson: People will know all across north-eastern Ontario, and particularly for me, in Timmins, that there were a number of forest fires still ongoing today. I just want to say a big thank you to those who have been involved in the suppression of these particular fires. In the case of the Timmins area, the fire there was quite

scary for a lot of people—smoke into the city of Timmins, pretty heavy on Thursday and Friday. There were a lot of evacuations all along Highways 101, 144 and 576. There was quite a bit of turmoil in regard to trying to make sure we got everybody out of there.

I just want to say that the people of the fire services of the city of Timmins, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the OPP, the Timmins police, the Emergency Measures Ontario people, the mayor, the municipality—all those people who have been involved—just really did a stellar job of making sure we do what's right when it comes to the protection of life and when it comes to the protection of property.

I was able to go in and visit the fire centre in South Porcupine and then the mobile command that was put up at Tembec later—sometime Friday, I guess—a really professional bunch of people that we have working for the MNR. They understand the nature of a fire. They understand what makes that fire tick, and understanding that allows them to be able to do the very professional job they have done.

On behalf of this Legislature and on behalf of the people of Timmins-James Bay, we want to thank all those people—who are still working on those fires—who made our community safe.

FLOODING

Mr. Bill Mauro: The Thunder Bay region has been hit with a record amount of rain. So far this month, we've received three times the regular level of rainfall. The result has been widespread flooding.

The city of Thunder Bay and Oliver Paipoonge and Conmee have declared states of emergency. Highways and roadways have been washed out. Thunder Bay's Atlantic Avenue sewage treatment plant has been knocked out, and countless homes have been damaged by the flood waters destroying valuable investments and priceless family items. I want to acknowledge all those who have suffered as a result of this flooding.

Speaker, I contacted all of my rural municipalities early Monday morning: Conmee, Oliver Paipoonge, Neebing, Gillies and O'Connor. Emergency Management Ontario is in contact with all the municipalities that are in a state of emergency, and our Ontario Disaster Relief Assistance Program is available to provide help to those municipalities as well.

Please remember: After periods of significant rainfall, water levels can become dangerous very quickly and without warning, so please stay clear of waterways. If you're on a well in a rural area, please boil your water if your well has been compromised.

I want to thank all those who are working so hard to respond to the flooding: government officials, Thunder Bay Hydro, firemen and police, and everyday citizens who are working to bring our region back to normal and helping their neighbours in their time of need. A lot of hard work has been done already. These are difficult circumstances, but the people of Thunder Bay region are

extraordinary, and their exceptional nature is even more evident when we're facing adversity. I want to thank you all.

BLYTH FESTIVAL

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I have to tell you, I love getting back to my riding of Huron-Bruce during constituency week, because there are so many good things happening in rural Ontario.

Last week, I had the opportunity to meet with Eric Coates, the artistic director for the Blyth Festival, and tour their first-class facility. It was founded in 1975. The Blyth Centre for the Arts functions as an arts centre for Huron county. The Blyth Festival presents a summer season of exclusive Canadian theatre. The success of the Blyth Festival led to the founding of many summer theatres in similar town halls across the province, many of which have since adopted the policy of producing Canadian work.

The festival is fully professional, community-based theatre. It is a priority to produce scripts that hold a mirror to the culture and concerns of the region. When the theatre was founded in 1975, few scripts that fit this mandate were being written, so Blyth jumped into the creation of new work and has subsequently developed and premiered over 100 Canadian plays. Notable successes include Governor General's award winner *Quiet in the Land*, by Anne Chislett, and two recent finalists for the Governor General's award: *Reverend Jonah*, by Paul Ciufo; and *Innocence Lost: A Play about Steven Truscott*, by Beverley Cooper. Developing and producing Canadian work in this context is an achievement worthy of our attention and praise.

I encourage all members to take in the Blyth theatre when they visit Huron-Bruce this summer.

ST. CLAIR KICK IT!

Mr. Jonah Schein: I rise today to speak about a wonderful community initiative in my riding. Kick It! is a community-run soccer festival on St. Clair Avenue West in my riding. It celebrates the historic roots of soccer on St. Clair that started with a spontaneous street celebration never seen before in Toronto, back in 1982 when the Italians won the World Cup. I remember, as a child, the excitement and the honking horns as over 300,000 Torontonians converged on the street to celebrate Italy's victory. It really marked a new chapter in this city, the cultural identity of the city as a diverse and multicultural place and a cosmopolitan centre. Decades later, St. Clair has changed, but it remains a diverse and a vibrant community and a wonderful part of our city.

The festival has been a real success. Kick It! organizers are working with community groups, with young people and with soccer coaches to bring our communities together. Community festivals like St. Clair's are vitally important. They foster positive dialogue about the iden-

tity of our community, about our history and about our common future. St. Clair Kick It! allows us to celebrate our heritage and diversity through a common love for the sport of soccer, and to remind the city that St. Clair in Davenport is the best place in Canada to enjoy soccer.

This Saturday, June 2, Kick It! will host Toronto's largest-ever pickup game of soccer at St. Clair and Oakwood, followed by an outdoor movie night about soccer. Please come join us. Players of every skill level are welcome, and the goal on Saturday will be to have fun.

SOMERSET WEST COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: It's a great honour for me to recognize a special anniversary for an important organization in my riding of Ottawa Centre. This year, the Somerset West Community Health Centre is celebrating 40 years of service to our community.

Somerset West Community Health Centre is a non-profit community-governed organization providing primary health care, health promotion and community development services using interdisciplinary teams of health providers, including physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, dietitians, health promoters, counsellors and others. Services and programs are designed to meet the specific needs of our community and provide a variety of health promotion and illness prevention services which focus on addressing and raising awareness of the broader social determinants of health, such as employment, education, environment, isolation, social exclusion and poverty.

Many great people have been involved over the last 40 years with the Somerset West Community Health Centre. The current executive director, Jack McCarthy, has been the ED of the centre since 1989. In recognition of his many years of community service, Jack was honoured with the Community Builder of the Year Award in 2009 by the United Way of Ottawa.

1510

I also want to thank all of the volunteers and staff over the last 40 years for their excellent work for the centre. The current board of directors: a big thanks to them—Mike Bell, Nancy Douglas, Tony Boghossian, Grace Xue Xin, Valerie Adams, Elda Allen, Andy Chironda, Cliff Gazee, Annie Hillis, Dau-Thi Huynh, Marguarite Keeley, Kristie Kelly, Glenn McLeish, Sally Rutherford, Vicky Smallman, John Becvar and Daniela Buri—for serving our community.

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: A year ago today, our leader, Tim Hudak, announced that a PC government would implement one-window access for farmers and agribusinesses. Rather than dealing with conflicting answers from different ministries and struggling to find all the

permits and regulations, they would have a one-window access to the provincial government through OMAFRA.

Three months later, the Liberals copied our commitment and promised one window, but they've done nothing about it. The red tape problem facing the agriculture industry is just as bad as ever but this government continues to ignore the problem in rural Ontario. It's hurting our agriculture industry and costing us jobs. Agribusinesses are deciding not to expand because the compliance system is so confusing and difficult.

Food processors that try to locate in Ontario complain that they can't get a straight answer on the rules they are required to meet. Farmers are spending too much time on paperwork and needless regulation instead of focusing on growing great Ontario food.

We've heard numerous stories of farmers and companies who asked the government what they needed to do and completed all the requirements only to be told there's another test, another study or another permit.

It has been a year since we announced we would create a one-window access for farmers and agribusinesses. We're flattered that the McGuinty government copied our idea, but they haven't done anything to implement it. It's time to reduce red tape for our agriculture industry. It's time to actually follow through on a commitment and implement our one-window access. Thank you very much.

CEMENT ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise in the House to welcome the Ontario cement manufacturers to Queen's Park on their annual cement caucus day.

The cement and concrete industries employ over 16,000 people and they generate over \$6 billion of economic activity for our province. There are over 200 cranes in the sky in the GTA area alone, so it's easy to see why cement and concrete are one of Ontario's most essential and most strategic building commodities. In Oakville alone, in my own community, I see examples of this every day, such as the new Oakville hospital being built, or the new parking garage at the Oakville GO station.

Working with government, communities and NGOs on climate change and on clean air issues, the cement industry and the concrete industry are a willing partner and actively try to reduce their carbon footprint. We all benefit when government and industry work together to solve common issues of concern for all Ontarians. Collaboration and listening lead to more jobs, a better environment and a better economy.

I hope all members will join me—even the NDP—at the reception tonight in the legislative dining room from 5 to 7:30 to hear more about the cement industry in Ontario and how, working in partnership, we can address some of the economic and environmental issues that are facing our province today. Unlike others, I would like to

welcome members of the Cement Association for their presence today at Queen's Park, and I'd like to personally thank them for the great work they do.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: There's much concern in Nipissing over the review of the local distribution companies announced last month by the Minister of Energy. They're worried that the minister and his advisory panel may try to implement their typical one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to LDC consolidation.

The council of the city of North Bay passed a resolution to this effect. It reads:

"Be it therefore resolved that the consolidation of local distribution utilities should be voluntary and beneficial for the shareholders, and results in reduced costs for electricity consumers; and further, that the city of North Bay confirms that the North Bay Hydro distribution system is not for sale."

I will be sending them my energy white paper, which calls for a voluntary approach for LDCs.

Council is also very concerned with the negative impact on competitiveness that electricity pricing in Ontario is having. They point out that 2012 global adjustment costs are trending to be 43% of the total cost for electricity. Their next resolution asks that the province immediately apply the same global adjustment allocation methodology to northern Ontario medium-sized customers with electricity demands greater than one megawatt. It also asks that the province use its announced review of the electrical sector to find solutions to this situation, which is seriously threatening the survival of businesses in northern Ontario.

Again, my white paper calls for new commercial pricing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Oxford to a point of order.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: On a point of order: I rise to recognize all the great farmers who were at Queen's Park today, especially the Ontario Beekeepers' Association, as today is the Day of the Honeybee, Mr. Speaker. The organizers have succeeded in declaring this day officially the Day of the Honeybee in a lot of provinces, but they have not yet been successful to convince the Minister of Agriculture and Food in Ontario to declare that day—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Actually, that is not a point of order, and my heart goes out to all the honeybees. That was a little bit different introduction than I've heard in the past, so I think maybe the member would know better.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Now, before we do move on, I do have my own personal correction of record. This morning I introduced someone who wasn't here. They're now here. So, in the Speaker's gallery, we have with us today Her Holiness, Amma Karunamayi, who has been recognized internationally for her commit-

ment to providing welfare programs to the underprivileged in India, with her delegation. We welcome Her Holiness.

And that is actually correcting the record.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated May 29, 2012, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

NATIONAL ACCESS AWARENESS WEEK

SEMAINE NATIONALE POUR L'INTÉGRATION

DES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the beginning of National Access Awareness Week. Across Canada and in communities throughout Ontario, Canadians are celebrating our continuing efforts to improve accessibility. Just seven years ago, Mr. Speaker, honourable members of this Legislature came together to unanimously support our groundbreaking legislation, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Since then, we've made enormous strides to develop accessibility standards, to work with individuals and businesses and to promote accessibility and to change public attitudes.

We know that accessibility is not just about physical accessibility; Mr. Speaker, it's truly about social change. We know that accessibility is the right thing to do, but we also recognize that greater accessibility means greater opportunity for Ontario.

Chaque membre de cette Assemblée peut être fier du fait que l'Ontario est la première province à adopter une approche proactive vis-à-vis de l'accessibilité, ce qui nous place en position de chef de file mondial en la matière.

An approach that looks at accessibility as more, Mr. Speaker, than just ramps or designated parking spaces, it aims to embed accessibility into all aspects of life and business in Ontario; to help businesses harness the buying power of more people; to cultivate the next generation of businesses and entrepreneurs based on inclusive design, products and services; to enable people with disabilities to participate fully in our economy; and

to help employers find a source of untapped talent. These are the real benefits of accessibility.

En 2010, le secteur public a commencé à observer notre première norme d'accessibilité, soit celle concernant les services à la clientèle. Cette année, cette même norme est entrée en vigueur pour toutes les entreprises de l'Ontario. Elle les aide à satisfaire aux besoins des personnes handicapées et à bénéficier de leur pouvoir d'achat.

But that is just the beginning. Over the next 10 years, we will make information and communications, employment and transportation more accessible for all Ontarians. These standards will help to make new websites more accessible, they will help organizations recruit and train employees of all abilities, and they will make it easier for all Ontarians to get around our province.

1520

I know there are many accessibility events planned in communities right across Ontario. I would encourage all members to join me in supporting these worthwhile community celebrations. I know that if we're going to make accessibility a top priority in Ontario, we're going to need strong champions—champions like the honourable women and men of this Legislature, champions who will drive Ontario to continue to be a world leader in accessibility. Together we can help make our communities more accessible, together we can help open the doors of opportunity to people of all abilities, and together we can make a real difference.

Mr. Speaker, I call upon all honourable members to join me in recognizing National Access Awareness Week.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Responses.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Many of us in the House and across Ontario remember the original Rick Hansen, the 40,000-kilometre Man in Motion World Tour; I certainly do. My office at that time was right on the Queensway, No. 3 Highway in Simcoe. We all walked out to see what was going on. The highway was lined for miles. Many of us, again, joined for the 25-year tribute—that was just last November—and of course it was largely in response to Rick Hansen's efforts that the first National Access Awareness Week was established, in 1988, to promote better community access, obviously, for people with disabilities.

Here we are today, recognizing accessibility week, 25 years and one week after that final stop in Vancouver of the Man in Motion. Certainly in those 25 years there has been slow progress—progress to be sure, Speaker—aimed at making buildings and programs and services more accessible.

One in seven people in Ontario lives with a disability. It's projected to be one in five over the next two decades. And there is an understanding, I sincerely believe, amongst all of us of the need to ensure that Ontario's buildings and services are accessible.

Of course, we're all aware of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, the AODA, which followed the lead of the former PC government's Ontarians with

Disabilities Act to establish a framework from which standards are created for people with disabilities.

In recent years, we have seen the implementation of the AODA's customer service standard and the progress towards standards for transportation, employment—very important—as well as information and communications. In fact, there was some new information about that today, something that the opposition had worked on several years ago.

I would note that in conjunction with legislation there are other ways, one very simply being awareness to encourage people to think about ways to break down barriers. You know, you don't need a law for everything—just move forward. Move forward with programs and take action.

So what are we talking about when we discuss barriers? Simply put, anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability.

Access: When we talk about accessibility, we mean more than just removing those barriers. It means changing attitudes, and supports, again, to better enable people with disabilities to be part of society.

When we discuss access for all people with disabilities, we are referring to people with mobility, sensory, non-visible, intellectual disabilities—referring to access, for example, to a safe and dignified experience in school, free from harassment and intimidation, access to the benefits and programs of school legislation to prevent so-called bullying that is inclusive of all, including those with an impaired ability.

Our party brought a mindset to committee with respect to Bill 231, the Election Statute Law Amendment Act. Our party at that time had seven motions accepted by government—that was a good thing—to strengthen accessibility for those wishing to participate in Ontario elections.

That said, a number of our attempts for improvement were rejected. Our former social services critic reported of rejected amendments to require that documents be available on an accessible website. These were turned down.

Now, today, we have an announcement from the government—this would be a couple of years later, as I recall. It's heartening to see this government talking of accessible websites. However, I think there was a 10-year time frame on that one. I think we can do a little better on that.

However, we do see progress, Speaker—slow progress. It's very important to recognize and to honour those people who make businesses barrier-free and very important to recognize employers who hire people who have disabilities.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's an honour to rise on National Access Awareness Week to speak on behalf of the New Democratic Party on this important topic. I remind those who are watching at home that we're talking about a due date here for an accessible Ontario set by this government of 2025. That's 13 years from now, Mr. Speaker.

Most of us will be gone from this chamber in 13 years, and I warrant some of us—the unlucky ones—will be gone from this earth in 13 years. So this is not exactly an imminent prospect.

I'm going to channel David Lepofsky here because everybody knows who he is. He's the chair of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance. Here's what they say about this government: "Government is clearly behind on achieving a fully accessible Ontario for all persons with disabilities by 2025."

So even though this is 13 years away, this government is still way behind on its goals and its achievements.

They also go on to say: "However, they"—the Liberal ministers—"give very little in the way of specifics"—this is on their plan—"on the government's future plans for new action to keep Premier McGuinty's election promises. A number of our key inquiries, anchored to Premier McGuinty's specific election commitments to us, go unanswered."

Here is the reality of living with a disability in Ontario: One in five live in poverty. Those who live on ODSP live on about \$1,000 a month—that's living in poverty—and even when they live in poverty, this government attacks them. How do they attack them? I'll tell you several ways. First of all—people don't know this—if you marry someone who has a disability and you have a disability, you get your disability payments clawed back. That is absolutely egregious. This is absolutely anti any sense of human rights. That's number one.

If you get a child increment—if you have a child on disability, you get it clawed back. Again, I would say a human rights—that's a grievable action under Ontario human rights. Also, if you earn any income—forget about trying to work. This government will claw that money back from you as well. I could go on. That's just on ODSP of \$1,000 a month.

Also, just recently, the Special Services at Home for adults have been cut. That's \$500 a month. This allowed those adults who lived at home, some of them forever with their parents—they're not going to get that extra money from this government. I've received numerous letters about this. This is outrageous. And we have today in the House MS awareness. We're all wearing these carnations.

Mr. Speaker, try to air condition a house on ODSP. You can't afford to do it, and heat is one of those factors that people living with MS have to fight and mitigate against. So try to pay your bills on ODSP.

Finally, what can we say about this? Yes, it's great to acknowledge a week, but acknowledging a week is almost a slap in the face to those who have to live with disabilities all year long—and have to live with disabilities all year long looking forward to a time when maybe their children can live in an accessible Ontario. There's a great deal of work to do, and we're not even on track to do it. That's the sad reality.

I really urge all members to read the reports that have been put out by the AODA Alliance. I urge all members to actually talk to—especially my friends from across the

aisle—their ministers, to talk to their cabinet and urge them that, really and truly, we are in breach of United Nations standards in this province when it comes to those who live with disabilities.

1530

This is something that we should be ashamed of, and when we stand during this week to speak about those who live with disabilities, we should do so in a spirit of atonement, quite frankly, and we should pledge to do better. Because we're not doing better; we're doing worse.

We are condemning those with disabilities to live in poverty, and the results speak for themselves. They are living in poverty. We're doing nothing to ameliorate that. In fact, even in their poverty, we're coming after what little is given them and clawing that back. Take, for example, only the one issue that is particularly galling to me: You can't marry someone with a disability, if you have a disability, without being penalized for it. This calls for a challenge. I certainly suggest and know that the AODA Alliance is challenging the government on this.

That's what we need to say. We in the NDP certainly support the Beer report, which came out a while back, and all that's in it. Here's to a better tomorrow.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Tim Hudak: I think I might need two pages for the size of this petition. As I read it, I want to recognize the two mayors who have joined us here, with your permission, Speaker: Mayor Bentley from Grimsby and Mayor Joyner from West Lincoln. The issue is important to them. I'm glad to see that they're here. I know that Mayor Hodgson from Lincoln joined us yesterday. I met with him in addition.

I, Tim Hudak, MPP for Niagara West–Glanbrook, submit this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on behalf of west Niagara residents and the community leaders present here with us in the gallery and at Queen's Park today. It reads as follows:

"Whereas residents who depend on the vital services provided at West Lincoln Memorial Hospital have raised millions of dollars and fulfilled their part of the commitment to redevelop the hospital;

"Whereas health care officials, doctors, nurses, hospital employees and the community at large are expecting the government of Ontario to honour its promise and commitment to redevelop the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital;

"I/we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That all members of the Ontario Legislative Assembly fully restore the funding committed to the redevelopment project of the West Lincoln Memorial

Hospital in Grimsby, Ontario, which was cancelled in the 2012 budget."

I agree with this petition and, with the 12,169 signatories to this, I affix my signature in support of this very worthy cause.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

Mr. John Vanthof: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas two-up ATVs and UTVs are not allowed to legally cross roads in Ontario but are allowed to do so in all other jurisdictions;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the department of transportation updates regulation 316 in order to recognize the definitions and the use of two-up ATVs and side-by-side vehicles."

I agree and send this petition down with Kendra.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: "Whereas St. John the Evangelist Catholic elementary school in Weston is overcrowded, with 480 students in a school designed for 260; and

"Whereas the students will be relocating 40 minutes away in September 2012 during the duration of the Metrolinx Weston tunnel construction; and

"Whereas the Toronto Catholic District School Board has placed St. John the Evangelist third on the urgent capital priority list for 2012;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Respectfully request full funding to replace St. John the Evangelist school during the Metrolinx Weston tunnel construction; therefore, the students are not relocated twice."

I agree with this petition, will sign it and send it over with page Sam.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas a report from Ontario's Auditor General on the province's air ambulance service, Ornge, found a web of questionable financial deals where tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars have been wasted and public safety compromised;

"Whereas Ornge officials created a 'mini-conglomerate' of private entities that enriched former senior officers and left taxpayers on the hook for \$300 million in debt;

"Whereas government funding for Ornge climbed 20% to \$700 million, while the number of patients it airlifted actually declined;

"Whereas a subsidiary of Ornge bought the head office building in Mississauga for just over \$15 million

and then leased it back to Ornge at a rate 40% higher than fair market rent;

"Whereas the Liberal Minister of Health completely failed in her duty to provide proper oversight of Ornge;

"Whereas this latest scandal follows the eHealth boondoggle where \$2 billion in health dollars were wasted;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government of Ontario immediately appoint a special all-party select committee to investigate the scandals surrounding Ornge."

I obviously support this petition, affix my name to it and give it to page Dana to take to the table.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mr. Jonah Schein: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas diesel trains are a health hazard for people who live near them;

"Whereas more toxic fumes will be created by the 400 daily trains than the car trips they are meant to replace;

"Whereas the planned air-rail link does not serve the communities through which it passes and will be priced beyond the reach of most commuters;

"Whereas all major cities in the world with train service between their downtown core and the airport use electric trains;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario stop building the air-rail link for diesel and move to electrify the route immediately;

"That the air-rail link be designed, operated and priced as an affordable transportation option between all points along its route."

I approve this petition. I will affix my name to it and give it to page Tameem.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: I have a number of petitions to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas subsection 6(2)8 of the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act identifies dental hygienists as persons deemed to be qualified to operate an X-ray machine; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in independent practice need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

"We, the dental hygienists in independent practice, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by the member from Richmond Hill that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing

Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act and bring it to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I fully agree with this petition, sign it and pass it on to page Daxime.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I have a petition to present. I'm currently learning French and this petition is in French, so just bear with my pronunciation.

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que l'article 23 de la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés garantit l'accès à un enseignement public de langue française;

« Attendu qu'il y a, depuis des années, une pénurie sérieuse d'écoles élémentaires publiques de langue française à London;

« Attendu que le ministère de l'Éducation de l'Ontario refuse les fonds au Conseil scolaire Viamonde;

« Nous, soussignés, membres de la communauté francophone et francophile de London, adressons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario la pétition suivante :

« Que le gouvernement de l'Ontario respecte nos droits constitutionnels et transfère les fonds nécessaires pour une troisième école élémentaire à London. »

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It gives me great pleasure to present 1,288 signatures today, part of my 1,000-signatures-a-day campaign. This petition reads as follows:

"Auto insurance reform needed: Protect consumers.

"Whereas auto insurance rates are too high in the province of Ontario and continue to increase;

"Whereas families across the greater Toronto area (GTA) are facing unfair insurance premiums that have more to do with where they live than their accident history or driving ability; and

"Whereas insurance premiums across the GTA differ by as much as 150% for drivers with the same driving record;

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"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Legislative Assembly undertake auto insurance reform that protects consumers, ensuring that premiums are based on a fair assessment of a driver's known ability and history, rather than unfairly targeting drivers on the basis of where they live."

I strongly agree with this petition, affix my signature to it and will give it to page Alexander.

RADIATION SAFETY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I have a stack of petitions to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that read:

"Whereas there are risks inherent in the use of ionizing, magnetic and other radiations in medical diagnostic and radiation therapy procedures; and

"Whereas the main piece of legislation governing these activities, the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (HARPA), dates from the 1980s; and

"Whereas neither the legislation nor the regulations established under the act have kept pace with the explosion in imaging examinations, including image-guided procedures used in cardiology, radiation therapy, ultrasound, orthopaedics etc.;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care establish, as soon as possible, a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act to bring it up to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and covers all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

As I agree with this petition, I will sign it and send it to the table with page Gopi.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: "Whereas the report from Ontario's Auditor General on the province's air ambulance service, Ornge, found a web of questionable financial deals where tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars have been wasted and public safety compromised; and

"Whereas Ornge officials created a 'mini-conglomerate' of private entities that enriched former senior officers and left taxpayers on the hook for \$300 million in debt; and

"Whereas government funding for Ornge climbed 20% to \$700 million, while the number of patients it airlifted actually declined; and

"Whereas a subsidiary of Ornge bought the head office building in Mississauga for just over \$15 million and then leased it back to Ornge at a rate 40% higher than fair market rent; and

"Whereas the Liberal Minister of Health completely failed in her duty to provide proper oversight of Ornge; and

"Whereas the latest scandal follows the eHealth boondoggle, where over \$2 billion in health dollars were wasted; and

"Whereas current committees of the Legislature have no ability to subpoena witnesses;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government of Ontario immediately appoint a special all-party select committee to investigate the scandals surrounding Ornge."

I affix my signature.

TOURISM

Ms. Sarah Campbell: My petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas tourism is a vital contributor to the economy of northwestern Ontario, bringing hundreds of millions of dollars into the province's economy from other provinces and the United States, unlike other regions in the province whose target demographic is people who already reside in Ontario;

"Whereas northwestern Ontario's tourist economy has been under attack by government policies such as the cancellation of the spring bear hunt, the harmonized sales tax (HST), the strong Canadian dollar and difficulties passing through the Canada/United States border; and

"Whereas studies have shown that tourism in the northwest nets significantly more money per stay than other regions of the province, in part due to visitors frequenting historical sites, parks and" other "roadside attractions that they learn about through travel information centres;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To keep the travel information centres in Fort Frances, Kenora and Rainy River open permanently to ensure that northwestern Ontario maximizes the benefit of our tourist economy."

I proudly support this and will give this to page Tameem to deliver.

ONTARIO PLACE

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I have a petition here to save Ontario Place.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government has closed most of Ontario Place to plan the 'revitalization' of the 96-acre site;

"Whereas Ontario Place was dedicated to the 'People of Ontario—Past, Present and Future,' when it was opened in 1971;

"Whereas Ontario Place was turning the corner when the government pulled the rug out from under it;

"Whereas after decades of neglect, an investment of \$10.8 million in new rides and refurbished attractions resulted in an 89% increase in attendance in 2011;

"Whereas revenues from ride ticket sales, concession sales, Play All Day passes and Cinesphere tickets all went up; and

"Whereas closing the park now is a waste of the money invested less than 12 months ago;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Ontario Place must be kept open while the revitalization plans are being developed and the park must remain a public, family-oriented space for all Ontarians to enjoy now and into the future."

I agree with this petition, Madam Speaker, and I'll affix my name to it.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

Mr. Michael Mantha: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government is making positron emission tomography, PET scanning, a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients under conditions where PET scans have been proven to be clinically effective; and

"Whereas by October 2009, insured PET scans will be performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with the Sudbury Regional Hospital, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I fully support this petition, Mrs. Speaker, and present it to Kyra.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONG ACTION FOR ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR UNE ACTION ÉNERGIQUE POUR L'ONTARIO (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 28, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / *Projet de loi 55, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.*

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Look, a pleasure—saddened that I only have 10 minutes to speak today. The government is already limiting debate on the budget bill.

This is the budget bill, Madam Speaker, some 327 pages. There's a lot of stuff in there, but most of it's not worth the paper it's written on, which is typical of the budgets we've had in this Parliament since the McGuinty Liberals were elected in 2003. And they sold this budget, Madam Speaker, on the basis of it being a budget for austere times, an austerity budget, one that was going to

tackle the fiscal mess that Ontario finds itself in; and I say that kind of tongue-in-cheek, because Ontario doesn't find itself in anything. Ontario has been placed in a fiscal mess by the current government because of its tax-and-spend habits without any regard for the ability of the taxpayer to pay. I cite as evidence, Madam Speaker, if you look at the numbers—let's just talk about the raw numbers for the time being.

In 2003, when this government was elected, spending in this province was \$68 billion. Spending for the current fiscal year will be over \$126 billion. That is a whopping 85% increase since this government took office. Now, if there's anybody out there who's getting 85% more for doing a worse job since 2003, let me know.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Mr. Mazza.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Chris Mazza, yes; Chris Mazza. We'll get to Chris Mazza at some point today.

So an 85% increase in spending: I challenge the government, as I have on many occasions, you tell me where that 85% went. You show me where Ontario is 85% better off or 85% better. You show me the improvements of what you've got for your \$126 billion in spending. You know what, Madam Speaker? That's when the conversation ends, because they can't do it. They can't show it. The evidence is not there. In fact, every time you turn around when you travel around this province, people talk about how Ontario is backsliding. It's going backwards. Government is spending \$126 billion, but Ontario is going backwards.

1550

So let's just, again, talk about the raw numbers. The debt in this province, Madam Speaker, is \$257.5 billion. That debt has to be repaid at some point, but all we're doing, because we continue to run deficits—and I'll get to that in a minute—is paying the interest on that debt. The budgeted amount for the interest on the debt this fiscal year is over \$10.6 billion.

Let's put that into perspective. The highest-cost ministry, the most expensive ministry in the province, is the Ministry of Health. Understood; we'd expect it to be so. Health care is expensive, and it's universal, and it's pretty all-inclusive. In general, we have a pretty darn good health system in this province.

The next costliest ministry is the Minister of Education. You know what? That makes sense, too. You can't have a productive jurisdiction if you don't have an educated population, and it is the responsibility of the province to educate our children. So that comes in at number two.

But I wonder if people out there really know that the third-largest line item in the budget here in the province of Ontario is interest on the debt.

Mr. Todd Smith: Sad.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's sad: \$10.6 billion. That's more than it costs to police this province. It's more than it costs to put fire protection in this province. It's more than it costs to build roads and bridges and all of the infrastructure in this province.

Mr. Todd Smith: It would buy a lot of health care.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Buy a lot of health care for \$10.6 billion: I thank my colleague from Prince Edward–Hastings.

So I think people really have to understand where we are in Ontario from a fiscal point of view, and then it will be very easy for them to understand, Madam Speaker, why we cannot and will not support this budget, Bill 55. We made that clear from the outset. When we looked at the numbers—and it didn't take long, Madam Speaker. Thirty minutes of examination on this budget made it very clear that this is not changing the channel. It is not changing the direction that Ontario is going. An "austere budget." Well, don't take my word for it. Let's just look at the numbers: the deficit of last year, \$15.3 billion; the deficit this year, \$15.2 billion; so, a one-tenth-of-a-billion-dollar reduction of the deficit.

At that rate, you know what? The good news, Madam Speaker, is, we'll be able to clear off the deficit in about 100 years. That's the good news. The bad news is, I'm not going to be around.

Hon. John Milloy: No; say it ain't so.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, I know. I'm not. I say to the House leader on the other side, I will not be around.

So at that rate, it's basically 100 years to clear off the deficit.

The government does have this so-called ambitious plan, but it always seems to start down the road. Why, if you have an ambitious plan to eliminate the deficit and start tackling our debt, wouldn't it have started now? Why did you just squander another year and watch the deficit essentially stagnate, and maybe by the end of the year it might even go up?

There is an old saying—I don't know how old it is, exactly, but the first time I ever heard it was when Donald Rumsfeld said it to Saddam Hussein about the Iraqi war with Kuwait, when he attacked Kuwait. He said, "You know, when you're in a hole, the first thing you've got to do is stop digging." You'd think the government would get it. They're in a hole. They're in a massive hole, Madam Speaker, and they had better stop digging.

What did this budget get us? Well, it got us downgrades from Moody's and Standard and Poor's, two of the biggest debt-rating agencies in the world. So the consequence of that could be—and exactly likely will be—that we'll actually be paying more than \$10.6 billion in interest on debt, because with a credit downgrade, the rate of interest that we pay is likely to go higher. If your credit rating drops, even on a personal basis, then likely the interest rates that you need to pay to borrow money will rise.

But let's talk about another issue, and to the crux of the matter—and I want people to understand why we've been ringing bells in this House, Madam Speaker. Ornge Air Ambulance and Related Services—that's the auditor's report—it's a disgrace. Each and every day we ask more questions, and each and every day there's more revelations about what has gone wrong there, but the government House leader stands in his place and ignores

everything we say. The health minister ignores everything we say. They promised a select committee on Ornge; they broke their word. We then offered to just change the terms of reference for the standing committee, and they broke their word on that.

Madam Speaker, with the mess at Ornge and the intransigence of this government, it leaves me no option but to call for adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. Yakabuski has called for adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1556 to 1626.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): All those in favour will please stand and be counted by the Clerk.

All those opposed will please rise and be counted by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 27; the nays are 34.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: For reasons I've already articulated on the terrible handling of the Ornge ambulance issue by this government—this government that has become disgraceful in the way it treats this Legislature—I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. Yakabuski has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1629 to 1659.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I would ask all members to take their seats.

Mr. Yakabuski has moved adjournment of the House. All those in favour will stand and be counted by the table.

You may sit down.

All those opposed, please rise and be counted by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 26; the nays are 38.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: It would have been a more interesting speech had it been more lengthy. But the member decided to spend his time in parliamentary foolishness, in my view, by ringing bells instead of debating. I really like to hear him debate, because he has something interesting to say from time to time.

I know that whenever his leader gets up to make a speech about saving money, I keep thinking about

Highway 417 and the fact that there's money needed to widen Highway 417 for safety purposes—it will contribute immensely to tourism. I keep thinking of that hospital in Cambridge and saying, “My gosh, the Conservatives must not want that to proceed,” because of course they are saying—they're demanding—that there be no further expenditures and that there be a great contraction. Then I think of the hospital in Burlington, the Joe Brant hospital. It certainly needs its funding, and I believe the psychiatric facility in Simcoe North needs funding.

So on one hand, we have the opposition demanding cuts, and on the other, they are complaining about the fact that we're not spending as much money as we could and demanding that we do so. I just do not understand that.

I know that the Premier was at a 407 east project announcement. I suspect that the member for Oshawa, the member for Durham and the member for Whitby—Oshawa would all be in favour of that. Well, if we were to listen to what the official opposition has to say—if they ever said it and quit ringing bells—we would not be investing funds in wonderful projects such as that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise today and comment on my colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke about the budget measures. Now, he threw a lot of figures out there. They're all accurate figures. The government knows them. They listened to them, I hope. But anyway, I'll repeat some of them for them.

Spending is up 85% since you took office. Ontario is not better governed, nor does it have better policies. In fact, we are going backwards, if you haven't noticed our record debt and deficit. The third-largest spending item is actually interest servicing. I mean, really?

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: How many more MRIs, member from Peterborough, are you going to get when the third-largest budget item is spending on your overspending?

My God, you can't run a province like that and give responsible health care and education. You're going to hit the road.

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: As he eloquently said, when you're in the hole, you do need to stop digging. They don't seem to realize that.

Let me tell you: The people in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock can't keep up with their household bills. Luckily, some have jobs—there is higher than average unemployment. That's the same for Peterborough too, I would just like to point out—higher than average unemployment from the province.

The unemployment rate is up for how many months in a row? For 65 months in a row, Ontario has led the unemployment rate for the whole of Canada. How can that government over there stand and be proud of that record?

You've had two downgrades by financial institutions, and yet the Minister of Finance acts like that's nothing.

That is something. That's called interest rates are going to rise and you're going to have to pay more money to service that debt and deficit.

What good is that doing for the people of Ontario when you mismanage their money and have increased debt and deficit? It is doing them no good. Don't try to pretend it is.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm pleased to stand here today and comment on some of the responders, comment on the outlook of the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. He talked a lot about the budget but didn't say much about some of the options that they had to offer to make this budget workable for the people of Ontario—offer some suggestions. There were none that I had listened to. He talked about—

Interjection.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: This is just this particular day. He may have mentioned some a different day. So we're talking about the present moment.

He talked about, in Ontario, the two major expenses we have here, which are health and education, and that the debt was the third most expensive item. I was listening to the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, but what I wanted to say was that the approach—as I mentioned, I didn't hear any productive suggestions about what you'd like to contribute to the budget.

But the NDP did have proposals. We listened to the people, that they didn't want another election, and they wanted the minority government to work together to make this budget more fair for the people of Ontario, and that's what we did by our proposals. The first, of course, was bringing in the 2% surtax on people making over \$500,000 a year, which was very popular, and people agreed that that was something that was fair to do. The second proposal that we had was that instead of lowering the corporate tax rate, let's keep it at 11.5%, and again, the Liberals did agree to that. So those were two fair items that we proposed to this budget to try to make it a little more balanced.

But one thing that we wanted to also see in this budget was more job creation, a job creation plan. We felt that this was lacking in this budget, so one thing we need to do is also work on that, so that we can have Ontarians come out of this budget with jobs and contribute back to the economy to help reduce the deficit.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I listened carefully to the remarks made by the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, and he actually wasted an hour that could have been used for further debate on a very important bill, which is the budget bill, one of the most important pieces of legislation that goes through this House.

I looked at the member, and he felt a little bit uncomfortable, because he had 10 minutes to speak and he kept on looking at the clock at around a minute and a half or so. Then he pulled the trigger and decided, “Let me ring

the bells.” I guess we all knew it was going to happen, but he rang the bells on one of the most important pieces of legislation we have in this House, and that’s the budget. That affects every Ontarian, all 13 million of them. Instead of debating the bill, he pulled the trigger for the bells.

I hear remarks from the other side saying, “We don’t support the budget,” but what do you want? Over your 10 minutes, you could say, “We don’t like this budget, but here is what we do like.” Instead, it was just a diatribe of attacks on the government.

Interjections.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I hear people yelling over there about Ornge. There’s a time and a place to discuss that. We have rules in this House, but there’s also something called debate. It’s very clear how this House works. We have routine proceedings; then we have the rest of the afternoon for debate. With two seconds left, another 30 minutes wasted. It’s unfortunate the member can’t speak—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. I’d ask the member to respond.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I’d like to thank the Minister of the Environment, the members for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, London-Fanshawe and Scarborough Southwest for their comments. Some I agree with; some I don’t. That’s not unusual in this House.

I did want to touch a little bit on the comments from the Minister of the Environment. He takes a very simplistic approach. When you talk about reducing the debt, the spending and the deficit in this province, he says, “Oh, you guys don’t want to spend any money. You’re just going to stop spending money.” That’s sort of like saying that if a family looks at their budget and realizes, “You know what? We are spending too much money on the food portion of our budget,” I don’t think anybody is suggesting that they stop eating, but maybe they need to go to the restaurant less and cook a few more meals at home, which is far more economical.

1710

There’s a different way of spending your money. The projects that the minister speaks about are all valid projects, but it’s not like the government doesn’t spend enough money to do those projects—\$126 billion. The question is, how have they managed the financial affairs of this province? According to the debt-rating agencies, badly—badly. When you get your credit downgraded by Moody’s and Standard and Poor’s, you’re not doing a good job of managing the fiscal affairs of the province. That’s fact. It’s not a debate. If you’re not doing your job, you get your credit downgraded; if you’re doing a good job, your credit either stays or it even gets upgraded. So the government is not doing a very good job.

If I had more time, we could talk about the positive things we’ve asked for from this government. But I’m sorry, there isn’t enough time. So suffice to say, for no—we could not in good conscience support the government

on this budget, and therefore the PC caucus will be voting against this bill when it comes time for a vote.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I’m pleased to join in the debate discussing Bill 55. When confronted with the government bill, with the government budget, we were caught balancing between the situation that we were presented with in Ontario, which was some severe economic and post-recession—a climate of post-recession and economic downturn. And so our priorities were that we needed to maintain some fairness for Ontarians. We needed to keep in mind what our priorities were. Our priorities are that we need to ensure we have a strong and robust health care system. We need to ensure that our children are educated. We also need to ensure that jobs are created. That’s an issue that is province-wide, that’s an issue that everyone is impacted by, and that’s an issue that this bill falls very short on.

The other issue is that when times are difficult, when you have an economic downturn, when pocketbooks are tight, we have to ensure that those who are less well off, those who are less fortunate, the vulnerable people in society, are protected, and that austerity measures don’t make an already precarious situation any worse. That’s another issue with the budget that we were presented with. So we tried to inject some safeguards to protect against these issues, the fact that we have a bill that proposes some cuts that will have some quite drastic and devastating effects on a number of Ontarians across the province.

One of our biggest issues, like I said, is jobs. Looking at jobs, there is a severe job crisis across Ontario. We have a significant unemployment rate which needs to be tackled. In the city of Brampton alone, the unemployment rate is 7.7%. That is about the provincial average. It’s a serious concern, and we need to have some constructive ideas that actually will address this issue. We need to do something that will directly affect the lack of jobs in the province.

We also have a circumstance where the average wage that employees are earning is decreasing. We need to have some safeguards in place to encourage a decent wage, so that people in this province can earn a decent living.

We certainly don’t believe that ideas like privatization and deregulation will solve the problems. That’s not the answer. Time and time again governments who have taken that approach have seen the repercussions. Deregulation and privatization do not work; they do not help a struggling economy. What the focus must be is on direct steps to create jobs in Ontario. That’s why I want to spend some time talking about some really innovative or new ideas, some fresh ideas to actually get the economy going.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Excuse me just one moment. I think there are a number of conversations going around the room. I’d just remind members that we need to hear the speaker.

Continue.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much.

One approach is a targeted tax approach, a targeted tax cut that would affect businesses that actually hire new employees. So if you create a job in Ontario, if you invest in infrastructure in Ontario, then you get a tax cut. That's a direct approach to encouraging job growth here in Ontario.

The proposal to freeze the corporate tax rate was a good proposal. It was a step in the right direction, but we need to go further than that. Simply freezing the tax rate is recognizing the realities that we face, but it doesn't represent a proactive measure in facilitating job growth in Ontario. Some creative or innovative ways to create or facilitate job growth would be a tax cut targeted at job creation.

In addition, we need to recognize that for a prosperous province, we need to have a skilled job force. A skilled and trained population can then be employed. Whether it's in the Ring of Fire in the north, whether it's in southern portions of Ontario or whether it's here in the GTA, we need to ensure that we have methods and a strategy to train individuals, particularly those who are historically less well off, historically oppressed.

For example, First Nations people need a strategy that involves recognition of their worth and a jobs training, skills enhancement strategy province-wide to address this issue, so that they can have the tools to engage in new employment and can be hired, and resources that exist here in Ontario and should be used in Ontario, and investment made here in Ontario for extraction or processing or refinement of these materials is kept in Ontario with a skilled workforce that can actually do the job.

Looking at another issue that was touched on by some other colleagues in the House, the fact that the budget needs to be balanced, that's something the NDP supports. If you look country-wide, NDP provincial governments have been quite successful at balancing budgets. We have a Manitoba NDP government that has a stellar track record of balancing budgets. Nova Scotia has had a great track record, as an NDP government, in balancing their budget. That's a very important issue, and we acknowledge and recognize that.

But balancing the books is not just numbers on a page. It's not a financial report where there is a loss column and a profit column. In these columns there are actually people, and people need to be taken care of. People can't be treated like numbers. People must be treated with the dignity they deserve. It's for that reason that an austerity approach is the wrong approach. Simply looking at a red column or a black column on a financial report or balance sheet is not the way to properly and justly and fairly administer a province.

There are people who are struggling, who need to be taken care of, and a progressive approach to solving the problems in Ontario involves ensuring that everyone is taken care of along the way. That would be a more comprehensive and a more wholesome approach to solving the problem. We can't just look at, "Okay, if we

cut here, we can save some money." But when we cut here, we put thousands of people out of work. Or if we cut here, we lose the only public transport available to northerners, the railroad we have spoken about. In this analysis, we can't forget that people's lives are at stake.

1720

One issue that has been addressed on a limited scale, but needs to be broadened, is the concept of Buy Ontario. For successful economies, there should be a notion of a global perspective, of a national perspective. That's obviously the reality of the time we live in. We live in a global market. But where there are state resources, where there are provincial funds, if we can allocate at least all provincial funds to be reinvested into the economy by ensuring that provincial establishments and institutions are mandated to buy in Ontario, that's one way to encourage a local economy. We can ensure that we have money that's state money, public money, reinvested into the community by ensuring that at least, at a minimum, where we have a provincial institution, we mandate a Buy Ontario program.

This type of program exists, as I said, to a limited degree in transit and green energy, but let's expand that. Let's talk about expanding that to the requirements that you purchase made-in-Ontario furniture in provincial buildings, made-in-Ontario equipment wherever possible. If we had a broader Buy Ontario scheme, we could reinvest in our province.

The key difference between a developing nation and a—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It's a privilege to be able to make some comments on the remarks that were made by the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton. First of all, I want to say thank you for participating in the debate today and not trying to shut down debate, and offering some suggestions, unlike the official opposition. I think that's the way the Legislature should work.

Earlier on in the budget process, the NDP did make some suggested changes. For example, one of them was to put a tax on people who make over, I think it's \$500,000, and I think we incorporated that and a few other changes that I can mention at another point in time.

I think part of the comments that were made focused on balancing the books, and that's what we plan to do and, by 2017-18, have a balanced budget.

He also spoke about austerity, and perhaps that's not the best way to go. We have a plan to grow the economy and, therefore, balance the budget—grow the economy and create more jobs by growing the economy. That way, the economy can become stronger and we can create more jobs, and we can keep our two most important areas, education and health care, strong. They're both important, both education, of course, and health care. They're probably the two most-discussed issues in this House in the past several weeks.

I think if we engage in intelligent debate like we are right now, we can talk about issues and come to an

agreement, or at least look at some of the suggestions. But at least the NDP is open to discussing things, unlike the official opposition, which just rings the bells and says—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments and questions?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Following the downgrade of the province of Ontario's rating last month, a number of what are called "linked issuers"—those are people who have credit ratings linked to the province of Ontario's—also received downgrades to reflect the province's lower rating, including Hydro One, which saw its senior unsecured debt rating fall from AA1 to AA3.

Moody's recent credit downgrading will result in even higher power costs for Ontario families and businesses, and it seems this government finds new ways to add to power costs in this province at every turn. When Hydro One's borrowing costs go up as a result, you will know that the burden will ultimately be borne by Ontario families and businesses in the form of even higher hydro rates.

Now, Speaker, I broke the news two weeks ago that the city of North Bay would likely face a downgrade to reflect the province's rating change, which Moody's confirmed on May 1. And, sure enough, through absolutely no fault of the municipality of North Bay, Moody's did indeed downgrade the city's credit rating. Six other linked issuers also saw their debt ratings cut, including the Hospital for Sick Children, 55 school board trusts, the Ontario School Boards Financing Corp., the Ontario Infrastructure and Lands Corp., the University of Ottawa and the University of Toronto. Again, these organizations did absolutely nothing to deserve a downgrade. They should be rewarded. They had the highest credit ratings in the province. But as we said earlier, you can't have a higher rating than your guarantor, so their changes in ratings are solely as a result of the downgrade issued to the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments or questions?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always a pleasure to rise behind my brother here, my colleague from Bramalea-Gore-Malton. He always does his homework when he speaks in the House in regard to addressing particular issues, and it's always a privilege to listen to how he brings some of his views forward on how it's affecting Ontarians.

One of the major points that he was bringing forward was how this austerity budget is going to affect a lot of our everyday people in Ontario. It's going to have a devastating effect on them.

If you look within our health care sector, the people who are on our front lines, who are trying to provide these services to our most needy individuals, are going to be left out in the cold trying to find the ways and means of providing the services that we need to our seniors. The individuals who are on Ontario Works, again, are the ones who need our help the most.

He highlighted the point that we shouldn't look at individuals as red columns or black columns. I think

that's eloquently put. We really have to look at the faces of individuals who are going to be affected by the choices that we're making in this House. This budget is really going to make a terrible and very devastating impact on those individuals by taking away some of the funds that were there for them to advance, where they saw there was an opportunity that they could advance and at least make some type of living for their family. Individuals are going to be making the decision, "I want to help my partner, who is on ODSP. I want to try to help my family, but if I go out there, I'm going to be clawed back. So the benefits that I'm trying to bring to my family—I'm going to be put down and those dollars are going to be clawed back from me."

So we really need to take a really good look at where we're going—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be given an opportunity to speak following my colleague the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton. His comments and suggestions about job creation—we recognize as a government that this is of absolute importance in terms of the economy. We must have jobs.

Let me remind my colleague that our government recently established a new chair of the Jobs and Prosperity Council, led by Gord Nixon, which will be advising the government in terms of how to boost the economy in terms of productivity. That's a really good thing in terms of giving us some more external expertise.

The other thing is, in order to have a strong economy and job creation, you must have an educated job force. As someone who has taught at post-secondary, as someone who is passionate about public education, I want to share with everyone in the House the fact that Employment Ontario is currently helping more than one million Ontarians each year acquire and retain a job. Again, it is something that we're committed to. Training and education is the right thing to do.

Almost 55,000 Ontarians are benefiting from the Second Career programs which are helping those who are laid off for no fault of their own—there may be economic changes, but helping those who need to be retrained so that they can have a second career. I saw that in my nursing program when I taught at Humber.

The other thing is, our government has committed \$251 million this year to support the Second Career program, helping over 12,000 Ontarians in this program. So, through this kind of training, you will have opportunities; you will have jobs.

Yes, of course, more can be done, and I do appreciate the member opposite in terms of his suggestions on how to improve the economy. It's always welcome. There's always room for improvement. But at the end of the day, in order to be a successful province and have a successful economy, we must have a well-educated, well-trained workforce. And most importantly, we have to work together.

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The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I thank all the honourable members who participated in the debate. I thank you for your comments.

I want to touch on two points with my remaining time. One was the point that I was beginning to make: that the difference between a developing nation and a fully developed nation in terms of its economy is the ability to add value to resources. Once we extract the resource, an economy that's developed will then refine or add value to that product. That's something that we really need to look at as a strategy here in Ontario. We have a number of natural resources, and we need to take those resources and also look at the processing side, the refining side, the value-added side. That is the distinction between a developed economy, and that's the direction we really need to head, and to implement policies on a provincial level to ensure that that's what we have: a legislated approach to refining or manufacturing or processing that it has to be done here in Ontario. At least a portion would be a step in the right direction.

The second issue that I wanted to touch on was some of the fears or the problems around privatization. With ServiceOntario, we need to be very careful. When you privatize or outsource a public service, it opens up a Pandora's box to misuse of funds. It opens up a Pandora's box with respect to misallocation of funds. We've seen some of the problems that can occur when you outsource with Ornge. My fear is that with the privatization of certain services and without the proper oversight legislated, like Ombudsman inputs and other mechanisms of oversight, we may see a number of Ornge-type scandals erupting across—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure to rise in the debate on this beautiful afternoon. We had a wonderful farmers' market out on the front lawn. The MS Society was here to give us carnations. There's a very solemn ceremony—I thought it was starting at 6, but it sounds like it's starting down on the grand staircase—for our fallen police officers today. There are a number of things happening here at Queen's Park.

We're here to discuss Bill 55, which the government has called the Strong Action for Ontario Act. Certainly, I don't think anyone would argue that, given the state of Ontario's books after nine years of the government opposite, there definitely was a need, Speaker, to have strong action in Ontario.

Unfortunately, though, once you read this document, I think it's a classic case of false advertising. That side of the House may talk a good game, but actually when you read the product that's the results of their policies, they certainly don't deliver. Speaker, I would contend that there's no strong action here, and everyone knows it. There is no evidence that the Premier and his finance

minister are prepared to show the type of leadership that is required in Ontario. It's really more of the same. We're desperately in need of turning our economy around and changing the course that's headed, unfortunately, to a \$30-billion deficit and a provincial debt of \$411 billion.

It's a tragedy for the people of Ontario, particularly a tragedy for those half a million that are out of work. Instead of strong action, this budget that we're debating here represents, I contend, a continuation of the failed policies and the runaway spending that has put Ontario in such dire straits.

Speaker, we saw evidence of that with the release of StatsCan's latest employment data. Unemployment climbed by 7.8% in April. Incredibly, when the rest of Canada added more than 60,000 jobs, we here in Ontario lost 7,700—a tragedy. This government now has the shameful distinction of having caused Ontario's jobless rate to be ahead of the national average for 64 straight months. Somehow when we talk about Ontario being a leader in Confederation again, I don't think that's what we were talking about, that we would lead the country in that.

But we in the Ontario PC caucus are looking for an exit from the road that the government opposite has put us on. We're looking for a new direction, and I want to take people back to the member for Thornhill, our PC critic for finance, who stated during his leadoff speech that that was just never in the cards for this budget. From the time that our leader, Tim Hudak, and Mr. Shurman, our finance critic, began meeting with the government to discuss our ideas about job creation, our ideas to put a hold on spending, it was clear that the government wasn't listening.

We put our ideas like a legislated public sector wage freeze on the table and it was ignored, just like every other idea our caucus put to the table. We recognize that this province is at a crossroads and we need to take decisive action to head off what we believe could be—and we hope not—an economic catastrophe. But somehow, even with those warning bells going off, I believe the government remains in denial.

We're not standing in opposition against this budget just for the sense of doing so. We provided those options, those ideas, and the government just didn't listen. In fact, they didn't listen to anyone speak. They didn't listen to their hand-picked deficit reduction guru, Don Drummond, when they shelved his report almost at the time that it hit the table. They're not listening to the chorus of private sector employers who sound alarm bells about the cost of power in this province. They didn't listen to the rating agencies turning a thumbs down to their fiscal plan. They're not listening to the horse racing industry with their attack on rural Ontario that could cost up to 60,000 jobs. And they're not listening to Ontarians, because the finance minister didn't even have the courtesy to go out on the road and ask them at the committee. So when it looks at the fact that our caucus wasn't listened to, you look at that company—we were in some pretty good company of people that the government also

didn't take the time to consult when they put this budget forward. Our objective, as I said earlier, was not necessarily to be obstructionist as an opposition, but more to make sure that our ideas to move Ontario forward were put on the table.

In fact, as many, many speakers on this side of the aisle talked about, this budget increases spending when at the present time the cost to service the province's debt is already over \$10 billion. When you factor in the continued turmoil in the European economy, the downgrading of Ontario's credit rating, and the fact that this budget adds about \$15 billion more to the debt, we know where costs are going to go: They're going to go up and up and up. The government's whole forecast is a house of cards that could come down at any time and throw this province tumbling into a real, full-blown crisis.

Speaker, I want to take the remaining few minutes just to talk about some of the things that I hear when I go home. I enjoy, when I go back to my riding, the opportunity to talk to constituents at events, and I think we all just enjoyed our constituency week. I can't believe what I get in my inboxes at my constituency office in terms of emails, letters, phone calls, approaches that people make to me. I just can't believe that this government can sit idly by and not take into consideration what Ontarians are saying to them about this budget.

I decided, since the treasurer wouldn't have his own pre-budget consultations, to have my own in the riding for the first time. I spoke to people in Kemptville and Gananoque and Brockville. I did a bit of a tour. I got some great, great ideas. I remember one very straight-talking lady, Cecile Artelle, who filled out her "have your say" sheets. She had lots of comments about the green energy policies of this government and the fact that the cost to the individual residents and business is too high; the fact that we need to protect jobs and to stop large companies from closing their doors on workers and leaving the country.

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She spoke about severance payments to civil servants, to be able to reduce the size and costs of government. She feared the cost of all-day kindergarten. And she really wanted the government to encourage businesses to come to Ontario and create well-paying, long-term jobs.

Speaker, in my last couple of minutes, I want to pick up on what the member for Nipissing talked about in terms of one of his businesses—because one of my industries is Northern Cables and their plant manager, Shelley Bacon. They've called Brockville their home. They started their business out of the ashes of a failed company, and they have just done tremendously. He is extremely concerned about his latest hydro bill. The surcharge or global adjustment fee, which is basically Dalton McGuinty's green energy tax, was nearly \$12,000 on one of his bills. That's \$5,000 more than Northern Cables paid on the actual electricity that it used; in fact, in one month, the company handed over nearly \$25,000 from its three sites because of Dalton McGuinty's failed energy experiments.

I want to put that into perspective. Shelley gave me a quote, and his quote was, "You should know we compete against companies less than 100 miles from here who pay only three cents per kilowatt hour in the United States." At that rate, and without a green energy tax, this site would have paid about \$8,100 for power. That's \$18,500 in Ontario; \$8,100 in the United States.

Now, don't get me wrong. Shelley is not planning to move his plant anywhere—he's very content and happy to operate in the city of Brockville—but he felt that it was extremely important, while we're trying to get new businesses into our riding, that we realize that your policies, policies right in this bill and throughout your nine years, are crippling this economy. They are stopping job creators from continuing to grow and flourish.

We want Ontario to become the leader again, so please listen to some of the ideas we have. You haven't listened to us at all since we started this process. Stand up and listen to the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm delighted to comment on the member for Leeds-Grenville's 10-minute summary of the budget bill, Bill 55, Strong Action.... He had mentioned that the Liberals weren't listening to Ontarians and that the Tories did not want to obstruct the process because they wanted to put their ideas on the table, and part of that, putting your ideas on the table—when we had the lock-up, we all had a chance to get a summary of the budget or a briefing on the budget, and from that day forward, the leader of the official opposition, Mr. Hudak, decided to decline to even participate in that process. So when we're not listening to Ontarians, the opposition wasn't a voice for their constituents.

The member from Leeds-Grenville did say he had gone out and he had spoken to a particular woman there, and she had expressed what she'd like to see in the budget, but again, the talks weren't there with the Progressive Conservatives. They hadn't put any proposals, so perhaps if they were at the table at the time, maybe that woman's ideas could be brought to their caucus and discussed amongst them and then proposed.

It's not our budget—it's a Liberal budget—but we listened to Ontarians. They didn't want an election, so we went out and we consulted with them and we listened to their suggestions, and that's why we were able to make that budget a little fairer and actually propose those things that people felt were going to make this budget more fair for the average Ontarian. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mario Sergio: I'm pleased to add my remarks to the comments made by the member from Leeds-Grenville. I have to say, Madam Speaker, that the budget as presented is the road map for the economy for the next year or so. I have to tell my colleague from Leeds-Grenville and all the members on the other side that they had plenty of opportunity in the past to make some

reasonable proposals. They will have, I hope, the time to make some more reasonable suggestions, as we have requested on many, many occasions. I do hope, indeed that when the bill will have the opportunity to go for public hearings, they will come up with some reasonable suggestions, because I have to say, with all due respect to the member, this is what we have presented. Now, if they are not happy with it, then let us know what you would like to see changed. But so far, they have been very silent. There have been criticizing, but they have not brought any reasonable—

Interjection.

Mr. Mario Sergio: They have been given the chance, like we have given the chance to the NDP.

Let me say this, Madam Speaker: They don't want us to spend any money. I wonder where they would like to see cuts. In education? In health care? In home care? In creating jobs? Where would they like us to cut? Would they like to cut some of the hospitals in Brampton or in Mississauga or in Burlington or in Cambridge? Where would they like us to cut funding? I hope that when the budget comes back, we'll have their—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

The member for Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to stand up here and add some commentary to the great commentary from our member from Leeds–Grenville on Bill 55, which, of course, is the budget bill. The budget bill was sold as an austerity budget, and it was false advertising on behalf of the government of Ontario. Coming from a media background, I used to deal with all kinds of advertising, and this has been false advertising—there's no question about that.

The member from Leeds–Grenville, though, spoke often during his 10 minutes about the fact that the government isn't listening. The government did not listen to Tim Hudak, our leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, on several occasions when he spoke on the strong measures that were needed that would have actually gotten the finances of the province of Ontario under control. They were ignored by the finance minister on a couple of different occasions. They were strong measures, something that the finance minister said that he was going to take, that he was going to implement strong measures. We didn't see any strong measures.

You know what? I'm not a speed-reader, but I can tell you when I sat in the budget lock-up that day in the budget deliberations, it was very evident within a couple of hours that this budget was increasing spending in the province of Ontario. It's a Liberal tradition; I understand that. I know you're trying to break from the tradition of increasing spending, and maybe you took the gas pedal down just a bit. You took your foot off the gas a bit, but you're increasing spending in 14 of 24 ministries. You're going to take tough action, but you increase spending in the budget.

It just didn't add up, and it was false advertising. The government didn't listen to Tim Hudak. The government

didn't listen to anybody. The member from Leeds–Grenville spoke often about the fact that the Green Energy Act is a perfect example of the government not listening.

Electricity prices are going through the roof, and we have the Cement Association downstairs here in a reception right now. They're complaining to me about the—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

The member for Kenora–Rainy River.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I'm pleased to provide some commentary on what the member from Leeds–Grenville said. I wanted to kind of build on what he talked about. I think he started off by talking about how this budget is titled Strong Action for Ontario. The government does talk about how concerned they are with putting Ontarians back to work, but what really struck me when I went through the budget when it first came out and since I have had time to review it is how short-sighted the budget really is, especially in terms of putting people back to work.

Recently, we brought to light the issue of the MNR privatization of the processing of hunting and fishing licences. There was nothing done in this budget to address that. That issue that we brought up was a stark reminder of what privatization really means under NAFTA, because those jobs that could be in Ontario, call centre jobs—certainly we can do that—have been shipped off to Tennessee. That's what happens under NAFTA, when you really do appeal to the lowest common denominator, where we have people, whoever can submit the lowest bid, getting the contract, and where we're competing with the United States and Mexico. How can we possibly compete with that?

That also brings to light what's going to be happening with ServiceOntario. The government is planning more privatization with ServiceOntario, with the argument that more people are accessing the service online, despite how costly it is. People need to have a computer, an Internet subscription and they need to have a credit card. The biggest thing is that in northwestern Ontario, where we need to access this service, we don't have the infrastructure in place. This is the same argument that I've been using whenever the government talks about moving to online services. Whether it's with the Ontario travel information centres, ServiceOntario, we need to have the infrastructure in place. So until we invest in that infrastructure, we are not there yet and we should not be doing this.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. I'd ask the member for Leeds–Grenville to respond.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the comments from the members for London–Fanshawe, York West, Prince Edward–Hastings and Kenora–Rainy River.

I want to make sure I again reiterate that I applaud Tim Hudak and our caucus's position. I think we had a very principled stand when it came to the budget.

Certainly, when I was having my pre-budget consultations, many people who attended talked about issues that were important to them: reducing the size and cost of government; having discussions about a mandatory public sector wage freeze; trying to wrestle the deficit down, not increase it, as this government has done under their watch.

The other thing is the fact that there are so many other issues—and I didn't ring bells in respect for the ceremony that started a little early, but I think it's important to put on the record the fact that this Ornge scandal needs to be addressed by this government. You can't continually stand in this House every day when we ask very important questions, put your head in the sand and not address it. Because you know what? In the days ahead,

the bells are going to continue to ring until your government gets it through its head.

I didn't bother taking my 10 minutes to talk about the seat-saver program. Who knows how much money this government spent in Oakville and Mississauga to save a couple of seats? I didn't do that. I took the opportunity to speak about what we feel was important, and that's getting our fiscal house in order, creating private sector jobs and making sure that this province is back to being the economic engine of this country, not the caboose.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. It being close to 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1753.

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Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	

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No. 58



N° 58

ISSN 1180-2987

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 40th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 30 May 2012

Mercredi 30 mai 2012



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
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Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 30 May 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 30 mai 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES AMENDMENT ACT (RENT INCREASE GUIDELINE), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA LOCATION À USAGE D'HABITATION (TAUX LÉGAL D'AUGMENTATION DES LOYERS)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 16, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 19, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of the rent increase guideline / *Projet de loi 19, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation en ce qui concerne le taux légal d'augmentation des loyers.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's my pleasure to speak regarding Bill 19 today, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of the rent increase guideline.

I want to first start by just recapping for people what this bill does. Of course, when we talk about what it does, we'll also see what it doesn't do. At the end of the day, looking at what it does and what it doesn't do, you have to wonder why this bill was put forward in the form that it is. Briefly, this bill restricts and sets both a ceiling and a guideline for rent increases in Ontario. The floor is 1% and the ceiling is 2.5%, regardless of any other circumstances or contexts that landlords may experience. So 1% will be a minimum increase, and no greater than 2.5%.

Where it falls between 1% and 2.5% will be based on the consumer price index. Of course, a lot of people in this House realize that hydroelectricity costs are not included in the consumer price index, and we've seen that, even by the government's own accounts, hydroelectricity costs will rise by 47% by 2015. That additional cost and burden will be placed on landlords, and they will have no ability to recoup those losses.

What was really the motivator behind this bill was the Liberal government's insistence on putting in an HST bill

a few years ago, which harmonized sales taxes and put additional costs on for everybody, including landlords.

But I want to say, if the government was truly serious about solving or correcting a number of the injustices in the Residential Tenancies Act, this would have been an opportune time for them to actually make some substantive changes and well-needed changes.

I'll just give you a couple of examples, and I'm sure every member in this chamber has heard directly from their constituents, constituents who are landlords, about the atrocious environment it is in this province to be a landlord. We have the tribunal for landlords and tenants. Many people know that if a landlord takes a tenant to a tribunal hearing, the landlord pays his submission fees and pays for his own lawyer. Tenants, however, have their submission fees covered, and tenants also have their legal fees and a lawyer provided free of charge—I shouldn't say free of charge; it's at the taxpayers' expense. It's a double standard here in the Residential Tenancies Act, one that is obvious, one that causes hardship and one that should have been addressed within this Bill 19.

Just further on with expenses, other utility costs such as water and sewer charges, which are increasing at a rate, typically, of around 8%—those additional increases aren't included and can't be recouped by landlords under this Bill 19.

I think it's also important just to put on the record some of the horror stories that happen with that landlord and tenant tribunal. I've experienced a number of them myself, with constituents who have come to me looking for assistance. Let me just share a couple of stories.

I had one constituent come to see me. He had shown a house to a prospective tenant, but then turned the tenant down for a number of reasons and would not rent the unit, the house, to that prospective tenant. A couple of days later, the owner of that home came back to that house and found that the person he had rejected as a tenant had moved in and was indeed squatting in his home. She had phoned up hydro and had the hydro put in her name, and he could not get her out. It took him three months to evict that person who had squatted in his home.

Needless to say, there was also significant damage done to it by the time he did get her out—he did so at great cost to himself—but there was no protection under the Residential Tenancies Act for people who actually squat in other people's properties. It was just an outrageous example of the abuses that can, and do, happen under this flawed legislation that we now have, the Residential Tenancies Act, and which are not being addressed

in Bill 19. That person, actually, when he tried to go and reclaim his house from the squatter, was charged with public mischief by the OPP for trying to reclaim his home.

I have another example—that one was in Frontenac county. I have another one from Smiths Falls, a similar situation, where the landlord had shown a prospective tenant a rental unit. The landlord rejected the application, and a couple of weeks later he came back and found that the rejected applicant had moved in and was squatting in his apartment. She had broken the window to access, changed the locks, put the hydro in her name and lived there for three months without cost. She went to the tribunal hearings and had her fees paid for by the public, and the landlord had to bear all of his own costs. In addition, that rejected tenant caused over \$3,000 worth of damage to the rental unit during that eviction process with the tribunal board.

0910

You know, we have stories and stories of this sort of abuse that happens, and what have we got for a bill in front of the House now, Bill 19, which sets a minimum rent increase and a maximum increase of 2.5%, has no regard for additional costs that the government is putting on everyone, especially hydro costs, and fails miserably to address any of the other faults and failings of the Residential Tenancies Act. Truly, if this government was being honest to itself and honest to the people of Ontario, Bill 19 should be withdrawn. Come back with a proper bill that does address the deficiencies and the failures of the existing Residential Tenancies Act.

I have another one here—again, this is in the Smiths Falls area—where a landlord went in to inspect his property. A large family was living there. An entire room was full, from floor to ceiling, with garbage. It was impossible to navigate in that dwelling, much like what you might see on these reality TV shows—Hoarders, I think it's called. In this case, it took the landlord four months, through the tribunal system, at, again, a significant cost to himself, at no cost to the tenant, and the tenant actually received three one-month deferrals before finally that family was evicted, then a significant cost to clean up that atrocious mess that was left behind.

I really would like to see the minister redraw this piece of legislation; we can't support it like this. It doesn't take into account any of the additional costs that landlords face, nor does it even attempt to address the deficiencies in the existing Residential Tenancies Act.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jonah Schein: So it's Wednesday morning and we're speaking to this bill again. I have to admit I have some growing impatience about this. I feel like, more and more, we are disconnected in here from what's actually going on in the province of Ontario. I think when it comes to rent control and protecting tenants and making sure that we have a province where people can live, we can't afford to stall anymore. We need to move this forward; it's really urgent. Paying the bills is something that

people have to do at least once a month, and the unfortunate truth is that more and more people are struggling to do this.

I respectfully listened to the member from Sarnia-Lambton, but the people who I'm here to represent absolutely include people who are landlords, but they include tenants. The tenants in this province are the people who are struggling most in most cases. They are the people who are having the most trouble putting food on the table for their families, and they're the people who expect me and people in this House to stand up and speak for them, because they're too busy making ends meet to be able to speak up here.

I'm really concerned at the pace of how this is going. I am concerned that the voices of the people who really matter are being left out of this. I am concerned that we right now have a government that's pushing forward a budget bill that's going to have really devastating implications, in some cases, on the future of this province, and that the people who matter are left out.

I'm also concerned about the lack of consultation, that the government has refused to have a select committee on Ornge. But the response has been ringing bells, and it means that we don't have a chance to have discussion that needs to happen. The truth is that people in Ontario can't wait for these things. They can't wait to put food on the table. The rent is due in just a few days, and we need to push this forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Soo Wong: I am pleased to be given an opportunity to speak about Bill 19, Mr. Speaker.

I want to remind my colleague from Simcoe North that today we're debating on Bill 19, not about the difficulties that landlords have with their tenants, the bad tenants and the difficulty evicting them. It's not about the hoarders you talk about. It's about how to protect the tenants to make sure that they have stability and, most important, also supporting the landlords. So let me remind my colleague opposite—it's very clear in Bill 19, okay? It's quoted here that, "The section is amended to provide that the guideline shall not be less than 1% and not more than 2.5%." That's the purpose of the bill.

The bill is not about the tenants' difficulty or the landlords' difficulty with the tenants. Our government is committed to providing strong protection for tenants across Ontario, but we are also concerned about the landlords. So in case you have forgotten to read this piece, my colleagues opposite, the government is providing some firm support for both tenants and landlords, providing stability for both the landlords and the tenants.

Our government also recognizes the contributions made by the landlords. The members opposite need to read the bill. It talks about the fact that the landlord can continue to apply to the Landlord and Tenant Board for an above-guideline rent increase if there are extraordinary increases in municipal taxes and charges for utilities. They can also apply to this board for eligibility for capital expenditures. So please, let's focus on this bill's

debate, as opposed to talking about bad tenants and what have you. The bill is here to protect tenants. I have those challenging tenants as well, but at the end of the day I have difficulties, but also the financial challenges of my constituents, and they are looking forward to this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I came specifically this morning to listen to the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington. He brought a certain story to the debate that I believe has some merit. You know, this Bill 19 was introduced on December 6, 2011. The bill itself—I'm surprised. If you look at it, this bill—here is the bill, for the viewers. That's the bill right there. There is nothing in this bill, absolutely nothing. Look at it, it's one paragraph. I'm going to read what it says. "Section 120 of the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 limits annual rent increases in accordance with a guideline which is linked to the consumer price index for Ontario, reported by Statistics Canada. The section is amended to provide that the guideline shall be not less than 1% and not more than 2.5%." That's all it does.

There are real issues in housing, affordable housing specifically, that the member I believe was talking about. For instance, they should have added a section here on landlord-tenant disputes. There should be a special tribunal to expedite these hearings. In terms of the landlord, they're euhred. If the landlords file a complaint now—they're going to say because we're Tories, we're against the people who are in a rental situation. That's totally false. The current bill that's being amended here allows the minister to really set the rent increase guideline.

The member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington always brings a very direct response to these bills that are frivolous. We should get on with more important things, like jobs and the economy in Ontario. Then people could afford their homes. The economy under Dalton McGuinty is on the way downhill. It's unfortunate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I just want to add a couple of comments to what we heard from the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington. I think all of us understand that it's a very small bill. It deals with a provision of providing a ceiling and a floor in terms of increases. But what lurks behind it are obviously some perennial problems in terms of landlords and tenants. I'll have an opportunity to make further remarks, but the fact that most, like 98%—and I haven't got the StatsCan number here, but anecdotally we know that the vast majority of people have a good landlord and the landlords have good tenants and everything goes along quite smoothly. It's really a question of providing the balance, the piece of legislation that will create that balance, so that people have access to a third party. That's really the essence of what we're looking at here.

0920

The question, then, of having an ability to respond to unforeseen costs—certainly, people recognize that there

are going to be unforeseen costs, and this is a way, then, to provide some kind of balance between the landlord and the tenant.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to thank the members from Davenport, Scarborough-Agincourt, Durham and Simcoe for their comments.

I'll focus some of my response here to the member from Scarborough, because I think her comments were very important for everybody to see and hear. She's willing to leave every injustice in place in the Residential Tenancies Act. She's willing to gloss over every injustice created by the legislation, in order to go after these floor and ceiling increases of 1% and 2.5%. When members say they're concerned about the rental increase—absolutely. Be concerned about the rental increase, but also be concerned about the fairness or the injustice that a piece of legislation creates as well.

I would say this, Speaker: If the member from Scarborough-Agincourt, or from Davenport, is so demonstrable in helping their constituents keep within this low threshold of 1% or 2.5% rent increases, go out and buy a few apartments. I'm sure you can afford it on MPP wages. Go out and buy a couple of apartments, rent them out and keep under that. Maybe even do something altruistic and go below the 1% rent increase. Put your money where your mouth is. Show people just how much you care for your constituents. Buy a couple of apartments and then experience the Residential Tenancies Act on your own. Experience the tribunal and experience when things do go wrong. They don't often go wrong, but when they do, they go atrociously wrong, and this government still refuses to recognize that injustice.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to make a few remarks this morning on Bill 19.

One of the things that came out in this, and was offered as part of the reason for the bill, is the imposition of the HST adding additional costs to several of the services that landlords are required to provide—such things as snow removal service—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I think we have about five sidebars, and three of them happen to be on the side where the speaker is speaking—your own person. So maybe what you want to do is give a little respect and listen to the speaker from your own caucus. Thanks very much.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I was explaining that part of this urgency to provide further guidance in the way of Bill 19 came as a result of the addition of HST costs on services. Obviously, there are all of these pressures that are constantly being put forward for the landlord. The question of costs increasing, such as hydro—these are all things that people understood would in fact impact on the land-

lord, and ultimately on the tenant, with the imposition of HST. So I think that in any of these discussions, one of the things that is so important to understand is that balance.

I made reference a few moments ago to the fact that hundreds of thousands of people have a relationship with their landlord, and the landlord with the tenant, that works fine and people come in and pay the bills and everything moves along. What we have, as others have mentioned, with the rent review tribunal and bodies such as that, is to deal with those periods when there is such an imbalance, when one is trying to take advantage of the other. But for the large part, this is a very stable, vibrant part of the housing stock that people can choose from and also for investors to invest in.

But in the case of the discussion here this morning, with the imposition of the HST, landlords were really given no option when those additional burdens of taxation were put upon the landlord. Then there is only one option for them, and that's to look at raising rents. The point here is that looking at the base of 1% and 2.5% I think is fairly reasonable. When I look at the tax base in municipalities on individual homes, the individual homeowner certainly doesn't have any say in what the municipality, and the combination of the municipality and the upper-tier government, decides to raise the percentages for property owners, homeowners. So when you look at that as sort of being something of an equivalent, you can see that the homeowners probably feel they have less protection from the imposition of those kinds of tax rates that they see almost annually.

But I think that as we're looking at this particular piece of legislation, which many speakers have identified as one that is less than a page long, it provides us with an opportunity in debate to look at some of the bigger issues for people to be looking at long-term. I think about the fact that we have over half a million people unemployed in this province. How many of them are trying to make a rent payment or a mortgage payment? There seems to be, on the part of the government, very little in the way of response to job creation.

At the same time as that is taking place, we're looking at the fact that we have, just to service the debt, an amount of over \$10 billion, and \$10 billion ranks, if this were a ministry, as the third-largest part of the budget. When you think of that \$10 billion, and the kind of missed opportunities that we have in this province because we are paying \$10 billion, it's really like just having a bonfire, because the money is not doing anything more for the people of the province of Ontario than if it were put to a bonfire. But it's that \$10 billion that is the burden that we carry on a daily basis—and then there is the debt, which obviously is the inheritance we leave for our children and our grandchildren. I think that when we look at the context of the province in the larger sense, the \$10 billion, the fact that there are only two ministries that have larger budgets; the fact that the debt, obviously, grows with our decline in the credit rating—we can only speculate on what happens when the government goes

out to refinance those bonds that Bob Rae put in 20 years ago and what's going to happen to the interest rates that we're going to have to pay in servicing our continued debt.

0930

I think it's things like that—whether you have a monthly rental payment to make or a mortgage payment, people need to understand that there are some grim realities for the province that are bigger than those payments. I think that people can feel justifiably concerned about what they see as a lack of action on the part of the government in regard to these things.

I think we need to look at Bill 19, certainly, as something that gives rental people some kind of surety in terms of the floor and the ceiling on increased rents, but they also need to understand that there are some very large macro parts of the economy that will ultimately come to affect them as well. It's really in that context that we need to look at Bill 19. I think that, given that these were to accommodate the increases of the HST, the government also has to explain the fact that those increases really could only be passed on to the tenants.

As always, in the big picture for tenant and landlord, the goal is always a balance. There's a need for residential rental housing; there's a need, then, to provide an investment climate for those who wish to invest; and then there's the fairness for those tenants who must pay the rent. Always, whenever we're having a conversation about landlord-tenant, it always has to be framed by the need for balance on both sides.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Nepean-Renfrew—sorry, Renfrew-Nepean—Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: We're so close, you're going to join us, I know.

Speaker, I appreciated the comments of my colleague from York-Simcoe. We've talked about how insignificant this bill is: one page, translated in both English and French. You have to ask yourself, what is the need for this bill at this time in Ontario? It sets a ceiling of 2.5% and a floor of 1%. That's sort of like legislating that the hours of daylight will not exceed 18 hours in Ontario, and they will not be less than six hours in Ontario, because we know that throughout history, it's going to fall somewhere in between there. You're going to have the shortest day on December 21 and you're going to have the longest day on June 21.

You see, in five years, the rent increase has never gone outside those two parameters. It has never been less than 1%; it has never been more than 2.5%. But these guys over here, when Ontario is going through the biggest fiscal crisis in its history since Confederation, they see it as a priority to bring in some kind of a floor and ceiling for rent increases, and they set the parameters outside of what has ever happened in the last five years.

So I'm looking forward to the legislation, probably to be tabled soon, on daylight hours in the province of Ontario, because these are priorities for this government. I mean, could we not get on with the work of doing what

is necessary? We've got a \$15-billion deficit, we've got \$257 billion in debt in this province, and this is the kind of stuff—they're bringing in the bill, but the members of the government don't speak to the bill. It's beyond me, Mr. Speaker. I hope that I'm here long enough to make some sense of what the people on the other side are actually doing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the opportunity to speak on this legislation. I was, of course, inspired and prompted by my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, as well as my colleague from York–Simcoe, who obviously brings a great deal of experience and passion to this Legislature.

Speaker, two weeks ago I had an opportunity to speak to this piece of legislation. I indicated at the time how the HST has been a big factor in why the government brought this in. I called this the “Oops, they did it again” bill, because this is not the first time that this government has had to create legislation to backtrack off the awful effects of their not-so-revenue-neutral HST. It was a greedy tax grab.

Remember, at the time they took \$3 billion extra out of the pockets of soccer moms, seniors and small business owners, and that has impacted affordable housing in this community, as well as greater Ontario. It is for that reason that obviously we like to stand in opposition to the Liberals, because they're the worst fiscal managers this province has ever seen, as my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke mentioned.

We are in a great financial crisis. They have made affordable housing less affordable because they are taking more money out of the pockets of everyday people, including renters and including landlords, and that's why they're trying to put this half-measured bill in front of us. But we are too clever for them. We are going to continue to talk about the awful effects from what they have done with our economy and the pocketbooks of the people of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Energy.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Thank you so much, Speaker. There has been a lot of very good comment about the content of this bill, and a lot of I think very important points made that, although this bill speaks to an issue of importance, of significance, it is relatively short. There is a very simple solution. We surely have had all the comments that could possibly be made on this very short bill—very short. So it sounds like we have a consensus within the House that this very short bill should be brought to a vote, and then those who support it can say they support it, and those who oppose it can say they oppose it, and we can dispose of this in a relatively short period of time to get on to address the budget or the other issues. It seems to me that that is the sum total of what we have heard this morning and have been hearing over the hours of debate: some for, some against, all agreeing

these are very short, focused, specific provisions that deal with an important issue. So let's get on with it. Let's bring it to a vote. I know that's what the people watching would want us to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Interesting comments that the member opposite made, but you know, I don't think he grasps the frustration that people on this side of the House might feel. The people in the audience, the people in the bleachers, the people watching the television might sense that there is a bit of frustration on this side of the House. Here we are in Ontario, the once leader of Confederation, once the richest province in Canada, now falling on very hard times. The demise of our manufacturing industry—a manufacturing industry that was built on reasonable electricity costs, because of Niagara Falls opening in the early 1920s. That attracted huge amounts of industry to Ontario, because we had cheap and reliable electricity rates. That built a tremendous province, a wealthy province, a province that knew no bounds as to where it would go. Then, in the 1930s, the Depression came along and wouldn't you know it, Ontario elected a Liberal government, the one of Mitch Hepburn. It drove the province into huge debt and increased the provincial budget, doubled and tripled the provincial budget—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Peterborough.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: —until in 1942 the Ontario electorate kicked out the Liberal government and brought in a 42-year reign of a provincial government which made this province into—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I guess the member from Peterborough didn't hear me. Last warning. Thank you.

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Mr. Ted Chudleigh: You've cut my history lesson short, Speaker. The Liberals were re-elected under David Peterson, where again they doubled the budget. They were elected under Dalton McGuinty, and again they've doubled the budget. They have no fiscal responsibility. All they know how to do is to spend money that isn't theirs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from York–Simcoe has two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'd like to thank the members for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and Nepean–Carleton, the Minister of Energy and the member for Halton.

I think that as we went around the speakers responding, the message is very loud and clear that this is a relatively small piece of the pie, that it's in the legislative complexities, and that the very large issues of the economy, the things that will affect these people, as certainly I would argue, to a greater extent than a question of a 1% to 2.5% range for rent increases—these are being ignored by the government.

They are allowing the micro issues to dominate in a way that keeps everyone's attention away from those very serious issues that others, as well as I, have identified in terms of the spending, the gap between revenue and spending, and the kind of problem that we face when we have the burden of debt.

These are the big issues. These are the ones that—frankly, this is a sideshow to take people's minds off what is really important for this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm proud to stand up today and to be able to commit my two cents to this bill. I'm representing my constituents in my riding of Elgin—Middlesex—London.

This bill is very interesting. When I first received it, I opened it up to read it, and I was pretty shocked at how little there is in this bill and the fact that the government would actually come forward and put aside fixing our economic crisis in Ontario to come across with this bill.

I see this as just another mismanagement by this government on another portfolio, and it's basically because they're catering to special interests. They're picking and choosing who they help out. If they actually looked at Ontario as a whole and decided to help everyone equally, I think we'd have a better province. We wouldn't be in this fiscal mess, and they wouldn't be picking and choosing winners and losers.

This is drastically affecting affordable housing, which is a huge issue in my riding. Currently, there's too long a waiting list, especially if I look at Aylmer, Ontario. The government has run out of money to create any more affordable spaces. There's now a long waiting list in Aylmer alone, and it has been drastically hit by this recession. Because of mismanagement of our dollars, there are no funds to continue to build or create new affordable housing homes.

When I'm at home talking about this bill, the constituents are scratching their heads and they're going, "What is going on with this bill?" I think this bill is nothing but a charade. They're trying to create it as a decisive action—"We're taking action"—but, in fact, I think they aren't doing too much about this. I'm not saying it just to pick on the Liberals, because it's easy to do; I'm just saying it because I truly feel they have missed the mark. They've totally missed the mark, and they're ignoring the real problems affecting affordable housing, as I've said.

Truly, I think, this bill is here because, as Ms. MacLeod said earlier, it's their misguided implementation of the HST. I think what the bill is really about is that when the HST came into effect, the government thought this was a sure way to increase their revenue, and they just spent like crazy. When they started spending money without thought that there is no money tree here in Queen's Park—I've been looking for it here. Now they've run out of money.

We're seeing that the government is bringing in record revenues here, but their spending has tripled. They've doubled the debt, and we're heading toward \$400 billion

in debt. The HST they brought in was to help supplement their spending.

When you look at the real world out there, if we overspend on our homes we don't go to a bank and say, "We've overspent. Give us more money"; whereas the Liberals decide, "Let's just go after the taxpayers and take more of their money." As I said before, we're heading to a \$400-billion debt and a \$30-billion deficit.

I'll go back to the HST. When the HST was brought in, it had a negative effect on a number of groups, and one of the groups was Ontario's rental housing providers. It drastically increased the cost of providing rental housing in this province, because rents were already tied to the consumer price index, and this forced providers to absorb the additional costs imposed by the Liberals. It should be noted that at the time, the McGuinty government told the providers just to deal with this new reality: "Change your business model and just deal with it."

Faced with increased costs, and limited in their ability to pay such a levy of higher rental charges, housing providers were forced to use money from reserve funds that they put away for upgrades to their affordable housing units so that people renting them aren't living in shacks or shanties. They have money set aside. So the government is now forcing, with these high costs due to the HST—they're actually having to go into the reserves and use these funds.

Ultimately, what you'll see is that affordable housing providers just get out of the business, therefore decreasing the amount of affordable housing available to Ontarians. But that's only part of the problem. With higher costs and rental charge increases restricted, in my area they have left. They've proved time and again—the Liberals don't understand the economics of any sort of business at all. When the cost of business reaches a prohibitive level, you leave the business; you get out.

Mr. Speaker, they talk about poverty and helping the poor and how this is supposed to protect people. I'm just going to go to an aside pretty quick. It's pretty shocking. This past week, at home, in my constituency week—my riding is Elgin, part of London and part of Middlesex. We have our ODSP office for people on disability in Elgin county. Because of the mismanagement that this government has done with the funds, they're looking at any and every way to save money. So their solution—because they're protecting disabled people who need help from the government—was to close our ODSP office and move it to downtown London. In my pharmacy, I deal with a lot of these clients. These clients don't have cars. These clients actually need face-to-face assistance. So I'm still waiting for an answer from the government: What are these people supposed to do now? They're here with this great big mega-bill, to make sure rents go between 1% and 2.5%, but at the same time we're going to take anybody on ODSP—you're going to have to move out of St. Thomas if you really want to get help from their office or you're going to drop off the system. I've had emails from people who are really upset about this decision.

If you look back entirely, they're mismanaging this province, and it is now having an effect on those who need government's help, those disabled or low-income people. Their solution is to try to control rent. I mean, where's the thought process behind that?

I'm quite sickened by the fact that this government says their poverty reduction plan is the big plan they have—and what do they do? They're closing a disability office in St. Thomas which serves all of Elgin county and moving it totally out of the riding. It might even be in the Minister of Energy's riding, or it might be in the Minister of Health's riding; one of the two. I just don't see the logic behind that, other than the fact that they can't manage their finances and now we're starting to suffer.

Back to the bill—sorry, I went off a bit.

Interjection: You digress.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I digress. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: But you made very important points about how the mismanagement is affecting—

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I did.

Going back to the bill: It does nothing to reduce poverty. In fact, maybe they should keep the ODSP office and services open to people who need it. The bill simply mandates a rental increase of 1% to 2.5%. I can buy that having guidelines for rental increases on affordable housing provides relief for those living below the poverty line, but in fact it's pretty much already in place. Tying rental increases to the CPI accomplishes this.

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The Bank of Canada has an inflation rate between 1% and 3%. Over the past 11 years, the annual inflation rate has never been above 3%. It would seem that the Bank of Canada, in terms of inflation targeting, is pretty good at its job. But as they always do, the McGuinty government think they know better, and they think they can direct the economic forces better than anyone. I have a strong suspicion that this is the reason our unemployment rate has been above the national average for 65 months now. I don't know what number they're targeting—I would like it to stop.

Before I digress again, another plant in my city of St. Thomas closed: Timken. It had been in my city for over 60 years, with 150 people employed. They're closing, and it's another sad day in my riding, with closure after closure. To top it off, they closed the disability office. But I'm digressing again; I'm sorry.

So if the inflation rate has actually been relatively stable and the bill does nothing to reduce poverty, why did the government introduce it? I think the answer lies in the point I made earlier.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Diversion.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Well, I think they're trying to win back support from the housing providers. They lost all that money on the HST, the higher cost.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I really appreciate the dialogue, but could we go through the Chair

instead of talking to each other? I feel left out. Thanks very much.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Sorry, Speaker. I got carried away here.

The amendments make sure the rental increases do not fall below 1%, a way to guarantee rent increases for providers. However, over the past 10 years—actually 30 years, in fact, if you look at it—the rental increase guidelines have never fallen below 1%. So I ask the government this: If the problem facing rental providers is increased costs and you guarantee them a minimum increase that falls below any increase guideline they've experienced, how are you solving the problem of the high cost of HST? The answer is, you're not. You're doing what Liberals and the McGuinty government are good at, which is making it seem like action is being taken to avoid addressing the real problems in our society.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's a pleasure to stand and recognize the eloquent, real-life examples of how mismanagement by the Liberal government today is impacting ridings across Ontario. I commend our member from Elgin—Middlesex—London for commenting and recognizing that this government is picking winners and losers. Unfortunately, based on the examples that this member shared just recently, again, it's showing how the Liberal government is leaving small-town, rural Ontario behind, and instead is choosing to bring forth into this House very, very thin legislation that really, in the big picture, just further emphasizes how they're mismanaging.

In terms of Bill 19, affordable housing, in our perspective it's totally missing the mark. We don't need affordable housing in Ontario; we need affordable living. To spend an effort to introduce legislation that has such a small impact on the big picture of things, when my member eloquently pointed out that HST is the bigger issue—that's leaving little money in everyone's pocket at the end of the day for living, and what do they choose to do? They don't address how to make life more affordable for all Ontarians. They chose winners and losers, and this Bill 19 is a perfect example of that.

As opposed to thinking about economic drivers that will benefit all Ontarians, they again choose to be very narrow-minded, forget to look at the big picture, and just prove that they don't get it. They have lost touch, and it's an absolute shame. As they continue to lose touch, business is moving out of Ontario yet again. Just like in my riding a couple of years back, where Volvo, which used to be Champion, moved out of Goderich and moved to Pennsylvania because it was cheaper to operate there, Timken, 160 years in St. Thomas, is choosing to relocate because they can't afford to operate.

Affordable housing is just one slim wedge or slice in the big picture which we need to address, which is affordable living, affordable energy, and bringing Ontario back to prosperity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I'm pleased again to rise to speak to the comments made by my honourable colleague.

Just a few little points: I was interested in the comments about affordable housing. There are quite a number of projects in his riding that the former member worked very hard to make sure came to fruition—units built. It's interesting, though, that when the Conservatives were in power before 2003, they cancelled the programs and did not fund affordable housing. Just so that we know that the affordable housing proponents in his riding wouldn't be getting any joy from them.

I was fascinated as well with the discussion about the HST. Of course, one of the points about the HST was to make sure that manufacturers, who have been challenged by low-cost labour in other jurisdictions, had the opportunity in Ontario. It's interesting hearing comments from the party opposite about the HST, because, the day before we introduced the HST, they supported it; the day we introduced it, they flipped and flopped and changed their mind, and all of the things that were good suddenly became bad.

It's also interesting hearing my colleague speak about affordability and about the people challenged on low incomes, because the heart of this bill, of course, is to assist in some significant but small way those who are challenged with incomes. What I said before was that there has been a lot of discussion about this; the point has been very eloquently made by the party opposite that this is a very short piece of bill. There's only so long you need to speak about a short bit of bill. Let's call it for a vote and then they can say no and we can say yes and we can get on with all of the other important issues that they've raised in their comments that have nothing to do with this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just had to rise. It's only a couple of minutes we're allowed to speak, but what a great speech by my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London. He talked about all of the right issues. Then we slide over to the Minister of Energy, and he wants to talk about ancient history. Let's take about recent history. He wants to talk about affordable housing. I'm just wondering about how many affordable housing units could be built in this province if we weren't in the crux of looking at possibly spending a couple of billion dollars for compensation for cancelling two gas hydro projects, one in Oakville and one in Mississauga. It could cost up to \$2 billion. The one in Mississauga is already a third up. They're going to christen it the Sousa Centre, after the member for Mississauga South, Mr. Sousa. So if you want to talk about affordable housing, if you want to talk about a record, I'll talk about the record of the past Conservative government, that created almost 1.1 million net new jobs in this province. We're stagnating here, under this government: 65 consecutive months above the national average for unemployment.

So when people on that side of the House want to lecture, my goodness gracious, all they need to do is invest five bucks in a small mirror. That's what you need to do, I say to the Minister of Energy: take a look in that mirror and ask what you've done to the people of this province when you are putting them behind the eight ball of \$2 billion in wasted money because of your ill-conceived political decisions. That's what is shameful in this province. Since December we've been talking about this bill. Do you know what this bill is for them? It's a filler in the House. We've got serious problems in this province, and that's what we should be addressing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The members will sit down, please. Thank you.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I want to congratulate the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London for commenting thoughtfully on this bill. But I do want to make my comments to the Minister of Energy. When he first found his legs and managed to stand up to comment on this bill, he said, "We've heard everything. We don't need to hear anything else. Let's put it to a vote." Then, of course, the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London spoke, and the Minister of Energy got up and said he enjoyed hearing those thoughts and comments. This is so typical of the Minister of Energy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): This is the second member who has not directed to the member who was speaking. You've been attacking the government instead of dealing with what your member said. Please stop.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker, for that gentle reminder. The member from Elgin–Middlesex–London put it clearly: There are big problems facing this country, this province.

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Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Who said that?

Mr. Randy Hillier: The member from Elgin–Middlesex–London.

It is falling on deaf ears on the government side. We have plants closing up. We have Timken, which he mentioned just recently closed up, and I will say, as we heard from some of the other members, that there are challenges. The biggest challenge facing industry in this province right now is this Liberal government and their failed energy plan.

The member from Elgin–Middlesex–London puts it clearly in front of you: It's not time for the vote if there is still valid debate going on, as the Minister of Energy himself recognized value in the debate. So we'll continue this debate, and maybe we'll drive some sense into some of the members on the other side.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Elgin–Middlesex–London has two minutes to respond, and I remind him to keep to the script. Thank you.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member from Huron–Bruce, the Minister of Energy, the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and

Addington and the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. You guys have long riding names. Thank you very much for your comments.

I'm appreciative that I got to speak to this bill, and there are a few more members here, I'm sure, who would love to speak to it, because all that I'm doing here is lending views from my constituents to this House, and I think that's our job—not to rush through and just push through bills, without clear and thoughtful debate.

This bill itself, as I said, is not really needed. Let's tie it to the consumer price index. That would achieve the same results, and we could move on and deal with the other problems that are occurring in this province due to the mismanagement of this current government and the picking of its winners and losers. The fact of the matter is, we are starting to suffer. I'm sure, in your riding, you are seeing it too, Mr. Speaker, especially in the rural areas, which it's drastically affecting. This bill itself does nothing to address any of those issues, ranging from over 6,000 jobs lost in my riding plus more closing of services like ODSP; affecting the horse racing industry, which is greatly affecting my rural community; and definitely with the rescoping, the flip-flop of the government, which last August, just before the election, announced the full redevelopment of my hospital, only to go back on their word and cut the project drastically. We are still waiting for what the rescoping means—and the fact that our mental health hospital in St. Thomas is closing in the year, and we need these beds ASAP.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Harris: I am pleased to take this opportunity to address Bill 19 and provide some insight and some value and stand up and speak to this important issue on behalf of my constituents of Kitchener-Conestoga and the rest of Ontario.

I think all of us in this House can agree in fact that the cost of living has risen too quickly in the province for Ontario families. I have heard from many constituents in my riding of Kitchener-Conestoga who tell me that life under the Liberal government has become completely unaffordable. We know that far too many tenant households in Ontario are stretched to the limit trying to pay their bills, including their rent. Despite this worsening situation, the Premier continues to allow the HST and skyrocketing hydro rates to eat away at what little disposable income these households have left.

Ironically, the Liberal government continues to pride itself on standing up for tenants, yet its own failed policies, like the feed-in tariff program, continue to increase the cost of living for those who can least afford it. Now, more Ontarians are turning to affordable housing as their only option to make ends meet. According to the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, there were more than 152,000 households on municipal waiting lists for assisted housing as of early 2011. That number was up by nearly 10,500 households from 2010, an increase of 7.4% in just one year.

Closer to my home, in the region of Waterloo there are 3,000 individuals and families currently waiting to move

into an affordable home. The wait, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, is long. According to Waterloo Region Housing, seniors can wait up to two years to move into an affordable home, while families typically wait six months to four years and individuals wait four to six years. This reality puts a real strain on families already going through tough times. We know that 20% of tenant households in Ontario spend more than 50% of their income on rent, while roughly 32% are in housing that fails to meet the standards of adequacy, suitability and, most importantly, affordability. Still, it looks as though assisted-housing lists will only continue to grow, largely because of the lack of affordable housing units.

Recently I was talking to Mark Paul, the executive director for the Central Ontario Co-operative Housing Federation, in my constituency office in Kitchener-Conestoga. During our meeting he told me that there hasn't been a co-operative home built in the Waterloo region for more than 20 years. Clearly we have an opportunity to make a difference, but the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing would rather offer Ontarians window-dressing instead of credible policies.

I must say I find it laughable, in fact, that the minister has tried to suggest that Bill 19 improves the situation of tenants struggling to pay their bills. Recently, while speaking about Bill 19, she even cited the Poverty by Postal Code 2: Vertical Poverty study released by the United Way. She went on to reference the study's finding that almost half of the tenants said they worry about paying their rent each month, while one in three indicated that they and their family do without the necessities of life—tragic. Speaker, the minister knows full well that Bill 19 would do absolutely nothing for the tenants cited in the United Way study if it, in fact, passes, so to suggest otherwise is plainly disingenuous.

But let's talk about why Bill 19 is just more smoke and mirrors from the Liberal government. We all know how this bill came about. Last year, the minister announced that landlords could raise their rents 3.1% in 2012. As expected, the government's move caused an outcry from tenants' groups. In an attempt to ensure tenants didn't blame the Liberal government for making their lives even more unaffordable, the minister tabled Bill 19. This bill would mandate that the rental increase guidelines be based on the annual consumer price index for Ontario, as reported by Statistics Canada, and that the increase fall between 1% and 2.5%.

I have to ask: Is this bill really changing? If we take a look at the facts over the past 10 years, the average rent increase was 2.1%, and over the last five years, the average was just 1.8%. That means that the current formula for rental increase guidelines already keeps the annual figure between what's proposed here in this legislation.

Let's go back just for a second to the 3.1% increase for 2012 that caused the minister to table this legislation in the first place. I'll remind members that the guideline, just last year, was 0.7%. So when you average it out over two years, you get a 1.9% increase, which, again, falls into the range being proposed in this legislation.

Let's call a spade a spade. Let's tell Ontarians the truth. Bill 19 is nothing more than the minister's weak attempt to convince the tenants' groups she enraged last year that she's really on their side. But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it's more than obvious that the minister hasn't fooled anyone. In fact, many tenants' groups have come out and called this piece of legislation what it really is: yet another empty Liberal proposal that fails to see the big picture. The funny part is, the Liberals think they can fool all of us, but we on this side of the House, and a growing number of Ontarians—yes, a growing number—know that the Liberals only like to give the appearance they are doing the heavy lifting necessary when they're really holding four-pound dumbbells.

Take Kenn Hale, the director of advocacy and legal services at the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario. In his response to this bill, he asked, "Why is this government doing so little to protect the homes of hundreds of thousands of tenants after promising so much more?" Mr. Speaker, that's a great question. Why do the Liberals say one thing and do another, especially when we have a real opportunity before us to roll up our sleeves and actually do something substantive to help tenant households? Unfortunately, Bill 19 doesn't offer anything substantive for families in need, nor does it provide any relief for landlords in this province who have seen their costs continually rise.

Part of the solution for making sure Ontarians have affordable housing also includes consulting landlords, particularly small business landlords. The landlords I've met with in my riding of Kitchener—Conestoga are not the rich, fat-cat, wine-sipping, Cadillac-driving folks that Liberals so often like to portray them as, belittling landlords. These are average, hard-working business people just trying to make an honest living and help the people who can't afford to buy a home. But after seeing hydro rates soar roughly 85% since 2003, many of them are questioning whether they'll be able to continue to invest in the Ontario residential real estate market. Unsurprisingly, Bill 19 totally fails to take into consideration this reality.

Since the minister forgot, consider the costs for businesses in this bill. I'd like to highlight some of them, in fact. First off, the cost of operating rental units rises up to 6% every year. Instead of consulting with the small business people, the minister, in typical Liberal fashion, just picked a number out of the air to cap rental rates at. In this case, it just so happened to be at 2.5%. Consider that the average two-bedroom monthly rent, adjusted for inflation, has edged down to \$840. That's \$43 less a month than what landlords were getting back in 2002. Once you factor in diminishing rental returns and all of the additional costs landlords need to cope with, like soaring hydro rates, it doesn't take long to see why many of them choose not to purchase rentals properties in Ontario anymore. In many cases, it just doesn't make financial sense.

You would think that an industry facing these many challenges would be consulted on government bills that

specifically affect its business. But as usual, the Liberals introduced this bill without even talking to Ontario landlords.

I'd like to share what the president and CEO of the Federation of Rental-housing Providers said in reaction to this bill. He said, "The government is unilaterally imposing a cap without any discussion with an entire industry and is initiating a policy that will be particularly devastating for small landlords." He went on to say, "We understand the government's efforts to mitigate price volatility, but setting an arbitrary price ceiling fails to recognize that housing industry costs, like repairs and maintenance, are not subject to any price caps." Obviously, the Liberal government neglected to assess these challenges, which, of course, isn't surprising.

I'll take an opportunity to end there, and I'll address my final comments in my wrap-up.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being close to quarter after 10, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise to welcome the Ontario Cattlemen's Association to Queen's Park to join us here today. The PC caucus appreciated the opportunity to meet with them this morning, and I hope all members will join them for a great lunch of corn-fed beef on the front lawn of Queen's Park. We look forward to seeing them all there.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I'd like to introduce Andrew Streisfield, who is going to be a summer intern this summer at Queen's Park.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you three of the pages from just the last session: Manak, Georgia and Constantine. They're all with us in the House here today.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd like to welcome a special delegation from Ukraine that consists of representatives from national, regional and local levels of government in Ukraine. The delegation is making a stop at Queen's Park amidst a cross-country tour of Canada hosted by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and funded by CIDA. Today, the delegation will be talking with my municipal affairs and housing officials about local governance and how to better foster municipal economic development within the municipal sector in Ukraine.

Welcome to Queen's Park. Vitayu.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to welcome Hanover's Holy Family School here. They're not in the House yet, but they are on their way, and I'm going to meet them on the staircase for a photo.

Hon. Michael Chan: I would like to welcome Cecil Fong and Andrea Wilson to the House. They are visiting from my constituency office. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I have a guest this morning from my home office in St. Thomas, giving great service to our constituents, Whitney McWilliam.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: It's my pleasure to introduce Rumana Deena from Scarborough—Rouge River. Rumana is the mom of Tameem Hassan, a page who is with us in the Legislature.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to introduce today my wife, Jane, her friend Jane Rock, and our other friends Ray Johnston and Connie Johnston. These are our friends from Moncton and my wife.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'd like to introduce the president of the Ontario Cattlemen's Association, Dan Darling, and directors Matt Bowman, Rick Hobbs, Tim Fugard and John Lunn. As the member from Oxford indicated, there will be a barbecue out front, and we'd like to welcome everybody to come out and enjoy some of Ontario's best beef.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd like to introduce the family of Stavroula Georgiadis, who's one of our pages: Maria Kanellopoulos, her mother; George Georgiadis, her father; and Panayioti Georgiadis, her brother. If I got the pronunciation wrong, I apologize, but welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): In the Speaker's gallery, from the great riding of Brant, we have joining us today a "lunch with Dave" recipient, Mr. Brian Wittiveen and Barb Joiner. We're glad that they're here today. Thank you for being with us.

Also in the Speaker's gallery, my summer student at the constituency office, Leanne Winkels. Thank you for joining us, Leanne.

We still have some more guests. The member from Peterborough.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. They're just going through security right now, but John Lunn is here today. John Lunn is a very active beef farmer in the riding of Peterborough and on the board of directors of the Ontario Cattlemen's Association.

Of course, I remind everybody in the House that there's a terrific barbecue that will commence at about 11:45. Get there early and you'll enjoy some very delicious Ontario beef.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Premier. Premier, since October, we've been calling on your government to legislate a public sector wage freeze. This is about leadership. It's about sending a message to credit rating agencies, international investors and businesses that you understand the gravity of Ontario's fiscal crisis and you're prepared to take action.

Tomorrow we vote on a bill that will legislate a public sector wage freeze. Why won't you stand with us and vote in favour of it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question from my honourable colleague and the opportunity to engage in this very important discussion.

I want to begin by saying that I think we share the same objective. We both understand that more than half the money that we invest as a government on behalf of Ontarians goes into compensation. But I think it's important, when it comes to addressing compensation, that we adopt a methodology, that we choose a way which is in fact going to work.

The approach being promoted by my honourable colleague and her caucus is not going to work, I say with the greatest respect. It is simplistic. It has been rejected by all the other provinces and the federal government, notwithstanding varying political stripes. We have chosen an approach that will in fact work. It will in fact get the job done and is respectful of our labour partners at the same time.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: The fact of the matter, Premier, is that this approach has worked in many other jurisdictions, and you do have the ability to take action and to do this in pressing fiscal circumstances. And as you yourself have pointed out many times in your justification for cutting health spending, we're in pressing fiscal circumstances right now. This bill will accomplish a fair, equal wage freeze for all public sector employees and it's going to save the province \$2 billion.

Premier, credit rating agencies, investors and the rest of the country are watching our every move. It's time to show leadership and do something for Ontario's long-term benefit. Will you stop playing political games and take the steps that Ontario so desperately needs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would say to my honourable colleague that they are the ones engaging in gamesmanship, Speaker. This is too serious a matter and there is too much at stake, too much dependent upon the success of our fiscal plan, for us not to choose a method which is in fact going to work.

Again I say to my honourable colleague, she should ask herself, and I recommend that all her colleagues ask themselves, why did the federal government choose to reject the approach that they're advocating? Why did all the other provinces—NDP, PC and Liberal provinces—reject that particular approach? They rejected it because it won't work.

Our responsibility, a heavy one that we owe to the people of Ontario, is to do something that works. We've committed to a compensation restraint package, Speaker. We will do everything necessary to achieve that, but we won't use the approach adopted by my honourable colleague, because it won't work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Speaker, I can assure the Premier, through you, that there are no political games being played on this side. We realize this is a desperately serious situation.

Isn't the threat of another—the fourth—downgrade serious enough for you to take action? Isn't Don Drum-

mond's dire warning about a \$30-billion deficit and a \$400-billion debt enough for you to take ownership of this fiscal crisis and lead this province?

Premier, I'm beginning to wonder what it's going to take for you to start taking measured, prudent and substantive action to start getting this province back on track. It's time for you to do what everybody else knows you need to do. Won't you stand in your place and take action and vote in favour of a legislated public sector wage freeze?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're taking action now. It's not easy, but we're taking it nonetheless. We're into difficult discussions with our teachers, our partners there. We're into difficult discussions with our doctors, our partners there as well, Speaker.

The approach advocated by my honourable colleague was one that was adopted by BC a number of years ago that ended up costing BC taxpayers \$85 million for, I think, some 9,000 public sector workers. We have over a million public sector workers in Ontario. I'm afraid to think of the penalties that would be exacted upon Ontario taxpayers, were we to adopt the methodology promoted by my honourable colleague.

There's a sure way to get this done, Speaker. There's a balanced, thoughtful and effective way to get this done, and that's exactly what we're doing here.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, on Monday I asked the Premier why he and his cabinet sold out Ontario's air ambulance service to Dr. Chris Mazza for \$1, against the advice of senior civil servants and legal advice from the Attorney General. The Premier refused to answer, as he has refused to answer most questions about the Ornge scandal over the last number of months.

Given the warnings about potential financial abuse and risk to patients, and seeing that we're now reaping the results of that wrong decision, I believe the people of this province deserve to hear from the Premier as to why he and his cabinet approved that faulty proposal by Dr. Mazza.

1040

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. John Milloy: The honourable member is aware that this is a matter which is right now before the public accounts committee.

Every member of this House would acknowledge that there were problems with Ornge. That is why the Minister of Health took fast action—

Interjections.

Hon. John Milloy: —when she was alerted to those problems. She took a number of measures in terms of new administration at Ornge and forensic auditors that came in. Unfortunately, the Ontario Provincial Police had to be called in.

But the most important thing—

Interjections.

Hon. John Milloy: —is that we have a piece of legislation before this Legislature, Bill 50. I think the honourable member owes it to the people of Ontario to tell them why he is blocking an important piece of legislation which would strengthen Ornge and address many of the concerns that he raises—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

It's starting. A question gets asked, and there's heckling even on the side of the people asking the questions, and heckling happening on the side of people giving answers. Even though the minister is sitting right there, it's getting hard to hear. Bring it down.

Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, I think what's owed the people of this province is a response from the Premier, who ultimately is responsible for the decisions that are made in this government. Seeing as the Premier is not willing to respond in this House, and seeing as his government House leader continues to tell us that these proceedings should be conducted in the public accounts committee, I want to put the Premier on notice that I will be putting a motion forward at the public accounts committee to call the Premier to come and testify at the committee.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, if the honourable member insists upon holding hearings on the floor of the Legislature, then let's get into it. Let's talk about what happened at the Oshawa airport. Let's talk about the fact that two weeks ago—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will now do two things: Remind you that I will individually identify you, and ask that you do not interrupt when I'm standing. And the finger-pointing is not necessary.

Minister.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago, a former Ornge executive, a senior aviation expert, said he had opposed the move to Oshawa airport. Despite that, we know that the member for Whitby—Oshawa not only lobbied to get a base in her riding—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Northumberland—Quinte West, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: —but she also posed for a snazzy photo in her Ornge helicopter. We know that the member from Durham also lobbied—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: —sending a letter to the Minister of Health—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer. Thank you.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Frank Klees: The government House leader tells us not to conduct the hearings here. I'm willing to com-

ply with that. That's why we'll be putting forward a motion to call the Premier to the public accounts committee so that we can hear from him once and for all, without the interruption and the rhetoric from his government House leader.

We want to know from the Premier: Why did he and his cabinet approve this proposal by Dr. Mazza, against the recommendation of senior civil servants—and we have the mess on our hands today. The public deserves to know from this Premier.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Government House leader.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I'll continue the story of the Oshawa airport and Ornge. Members may want to review the Toronto Star this morning. Three emails obtained by the Star imply that one Jim Flaherty, the federal finance minister—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Peterborough, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: —was interested in where Ornge was going to be—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Huron—Bruce, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: I quote, Mr. Speaker: "The first email, dated Saturday, June 11, and sent by Ornge staffer Matthew Ellis"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: —"to Lisa Kirbie, the agency's director of government relations"—and a former Tory staffer—"said: 'Jim Flaherty is eagerly awaiting a decision on whether or not we'll be going to Oshawa.'"

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Premier. The government's 300-page omnibus Bill 55 will amend 69 pieces of government legislation. How many can the Premier name?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The 17 schedules in the budget, which are all referenced—and I will submit to the Legislature the page references in the budget—have all been clearly outlined. Fully one third of the budget bill deals with relatively modest changes to improve services at ServiceOntario for all Ontarians.

We have tabled a budget that protects investments in health care, protects investments in education, freezes the corporate tax rate, as was requested by the third party, and applies a new tax on Ontarians who earn more than \$500,000. The budget is comprehensive. It's actually relatively a small budget bill when you remove the sec-

tions that deal strictly with ServiceOntario. It's the right plan for a better future for Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm sure that the Premier and finance minister would agree that changes like this, these wholesale changes, require scrutiny. In Ottawa, the federal Conservatives are pushing their own omnibus bill and the Premier's federal counterparts in the Liberal Party are asking serious questions about whether this is good for democracy in Canada. One MPP said that the environmental changes "all amount to an incoherent plan buried in a budget bill so as not to see the light of day." Who was this person? It was the Premier's seatmate in Ottawa South, David McGuinty.

Does the finance minister think his counterparts in Ottawa, including the Premier's brother, are wrong about the threat of changes buried in the omnibus bill, or does he agree that we need to take adequate time to consider important legislation?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I don't recall the Prime Minister of Canada sitting down with the leader of the NDP to discuss their budget and have extensive negotiations. You may not be aware of this: Those discussions are going on this morning. So it's a very different situation.

To the member's point: Let's review Bill 55. Schedule 1 deals with ambulance services collective bargaining. It's referenced on pages 74 and 75 of the budget. Schedule 2 deals with the Assessment Act—requests made by municipalities; page 264 of the budget. The Automobile Insurance Rate Stabilization Act, which is designed to keep auto insurance rates low, is referenced on pages 55 to 59 and 264 of the budget. That's in there.

Please don't stop these important reforms that have been asked of us by consumers, by municipalities, to build that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Michael Prue: New Democrats are very proud of what we've achieved in this budget process. We worked hard to make changes that would make life better for parents who need child care or patients waiting for health care, and we made the budget a little more fair by asking high-income earners to pay more. Is the government ready to admit that their 300-page omnibus bill can be improved as well? If so, if you think it can be improved, will you commit to enough time to closely look at it and make those improvements?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We did that on two occasions yesterday: once here in question period, and the government House leader tabled a motion that provides for extensive hearings. You should be proud of this bill, and that's why you should vote for it; you had an input into it.

Let me tell you what else you're slowing down. Let's talk about some of these other omnibus things that are detrimental. Schedule 29 deals with implementing building Highway 407 east, which will create hundreds of jobs. We need this passed to get people working, to build that highway. What do you have against that?

Let's look at some others. Here are two extremely controversial parts of the bill: schedules 25 and 26, which deal with the Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act and the Funeral Directors and Establishments Act, changes that that industry has been asking—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

1050

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Jonah Schein: This question is to the Premier. In 1993, the Legislature passed the Environment Bill of Rights. It passed with the support of Liberal MPPs, including some cabinet ministers who are still here. Under the Environmental Bill of Rights in Ontario, citizens have a right to comment on important legal, regulatory and policy changes that can affect the quality of our air, our water, our lands and our wildlife. Does this government still believe in this principle?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Naturally, Mr. Speaker, the government believes in that and has, on a number of issues, engaged in very extensive consultations. We're always interested in hearing from those who reside in the province of Ontario. We even hear from people outside of Ontario. We don't think that somehow there's a conspiracy going on that there are people being funded from outside of Ontario. We believe in hearing from all of these folks. So, yes, we think it's extremely important.

That's why when we have hearings in committees, for instance, there's an opportunity for people to make their representations on those occasions. They can send emails to us. They can send letters to us. They have individual meetings. So the kind of engagement that's taking place is very extensive.

I welcome the thoughts of the member of the opposition on matters related to the environment and, indeed, any other matters that come before the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jonah Schein: Back to the Premier: Environmental stakeholders actually disagree with what you've said here.

The government's 300-page omnibus bill includes significant changes to many of Ontario's environmental laws, yet this government is effectively bypassing the public consultation and transparency required by the Environmental Bill of Rights. If this government does believe that citizens should have a right to comment on important policy changes that can affect the quality of our air, our water and our land, why haven't they put these changes through the Environmental Bill of Rights and allowed for true public consultation?

Hon. James J. Bradley: What I'm very worried about is, a Conservative member of the Legislature brought forward a bill which would, in effect, some people said, gut the Endangered Species Act. When the vote came to the House, overwhelmingly members of the NDP caucus

joined with members of the Conservative caucus to try to gut the Endangered Species Act. There were a couple of exceptions—the member for Beaches–East York and yourself—but you were unable to persuade your colleagues to stand up for the environment first instead of some kind of convenience. I'm going to report that to Ruth Grier. I'm going to report that to Bud Wildman.

People in the environmental community are wondering what's happening. You voted against the pesticide ban for cosmetic purposes. You voted against the Endangered Species Act.

I am genuinely concerned with—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Back to the Premier: You know, we have heard from Bud Wildman, we've heard from folks. We're talking about a government bill that's going to hurt the environment.

The principles of consultation are very basic, and they've worked very well for over 20 years. Citizens have a right to see and to comment on changes that affect the environment. When will this government listen to the people of Ontario?

Hon. James J. Bradley: In fact, that's exactly what has been happening. You will see that the legislation is coming forward and the regulations and the policies are reflective of what we've heard from the people of Ontario.

I can tell you that the environmental community out there is very concerned about the new direction of the NDP. Apparently, the environmental wing of the NDP has been hijacked. Now there's little difference between the Conservative Party and the NDP on issues that come before the House. They're one big happy family against the environment. This is a change from what used to happen in years gone by. I know there must be a tear coming down the eye of my friend Bud Wildman and a frown of concern from my friend Ruth Grier that the NDP has abandoned the environment.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, I have a very simple question to the Premier, and I want to make this as simple as possible. All I really would like is either yes or no.

Will the Premier agree to come to the public accounts committee to answer questions on this important issue? Because the people of this province are waiting to hear from the man himself who's responsible for the decisions that were made to give air ambulance service in Ontario to Dr. Chris Mazza.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll be delighted to speak to the question. Let me say, Speaker, that we've spent a considerable amount of time and devoted a lot of energy and committee time—and appropriately so—to addressing this issue. But I think it's important to distinguish between the perspective held by my honourable colleague opposite and ours on this side of the House.

I would suggest that a confused public might pay attention to objective, dispassionate, arm's-length, non-partisan, reliable officials in this matter. That's why we had the auditor take a look at this. I think it's important that we rely on his observations and his recommendations.

We've also invited the Ontario Provincial Police in to conduct their own investigation, and I think we should await the outcome of that investigation again. I think that's the appropriate thing to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Well, Speaker, I guess I didn't make it simple enough. We have a very straightforward question for the Premier. If he has been watching the proceedings of the committee, we're hearing a great deal of information—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of the Environment, come to order.

Mr. Frank Klees: —about decisions that were made to entrust Ontario's air ambulance service to people who were not competent to carry out that program. We heard that again today.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Eglinton—Lawrence, come to order.

Mr. Frank Klees: So we would like to know from the Premier, given that he has refused to answer direct questions here, will he agree to come before the public accounts committee in response to a motion that I will be filing to call him to that committee?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I'll say it again and a little bit more directly. My honourable colleague's interest in this is purely partisan. We have a responsibility in government to uphold the public interest.

Again I say to the public, I think we can and should rely on the auditor's report. I think we can and should rely on the investigation being conducted by the Ontario Provincial Police. I think we can and should rely on some of the measures that we've already put in place.

We have replaced the leadership at Ornge. We have put in place a new performance agreement so that we can lend better direction and bring more transparency and more oversight to bear.

We also have a bill on the floor of this House, Speaker, which even objectively will improve our ability—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: —to ensure we get the very best out of Ornge from a variety of different perspectives. Again I say to my honourable colleague, if his interest is truly the public interest, then let's move forward with the bill that's already before this House.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est également pour le premier ministre. Today, Tom Rothfels, a former Ornge

executive, said that he was so concerned with the operation at Ornge that he actually called one of the board members of Ornge, although he had been forbidden from doing that. Jacob Blum testified that he also became so concerned that he went directly to the ministry and talked to ministry officials. Earlier this week, we saw an internal memo from the legal department of the Ministry of Health, expressing deep concern about the Ornge model.

It seems to me that everyone who became familiar with the situation at Ornge saw the red flag, rang the alarm bell. Can the Premier explain why the minister didn't listen?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. John Milloy: There is no secret that action has been taken to correct many of the concerns that have been raised at Ornge. But, Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

Hon. John Milloy: No, the opposition is right. The final piece of the puzzle is Bill 50, and the question is, why won't they let it pass?

But if the member wants to talk about concerns, what about all the concerns that were raised about Oshawa airport? Despite that, Mr. Speaker, we saw lobbying by Jim Flaherty. We saw lobbying by local Conservative members.

Again to quote from the Toronto Star, Matthew Ellis, another former Conservative—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I haven't given up, and I won't. I'll wait those extra seconds.

Minister.

1100

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, Matthew Ellis, a prominent Conservative who was working for Ornge, sent an email on June 18, 2011, stating, "Any answer on Oshawa base? I'm being confronted by two Flahertys, Chris Alexander," the Conservative MP for the riding of Ajax-Pickering, "and several candidates," at an event that he attended. I think that if concerns were raised about Oshawa, we want to know, why did the Conservative Party continue to lobby?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is directed at the Premier. He was delighted to answer questions from the previous member. I would be delighted if he answered my question.

The problems at Ornge were apparent to anyone who looked and to anyone who asked, from salaries that were out of control to kickbacks that Mr. Rothfels described as very concerning. The ministry ignored its own legal department; they ignored executives at Ornge; they even ignored questions from the MPPs in this Legislature. I guess alarm bells were loud enough, but as long as there were insiders like Alfred Apps and Don Guy operating behind the scene, nobody was listening. This is what it looks like from this side of the House.

Why does the Premier think that the minister's excuses are credible?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm quite frankly a little astonished by the member's question. We've discussed here numerous times in this Legislature the correspondence that was received by the New Democratic Party early on in the process about Ornge, and yet they failed to raise any red flags. We've talked about the fact that the prominent Conservatives that were working at Ornge brought in Kelly Mitchell with the express purpose of lobbying the Conservative Party, lobbying members. All they did is pose for snazzy pictures and continue to lobby to have it come to the Oshawa airport.

The concerns that the honourable member is talking about are based on information that was received by the leader of the opposition, the leader of the New Democratic Party, by herself and by many, many members across the floor in the Progressive Conservative and NDP caucuses.

ASSISTANCE TO FLOOD VICTIMS

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Over the last several days there has been severe flooding in Thunder Bay. In fact, the city of Thunder Bay has declared a state of emergency. And in fact, two other communities in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan, Conmee and Oliver Paipoonge, have both declared states of emergency. There has been severe, widespread flooding. Hundreds of basements have been flooded out. Large sections of highway have been completely removed, and power and gas turned off to hundreds of homes.

Minister, we know water flows can become dangerous and very high very quickly. We've got a number of dams in our regions that have released water or will be releasing water, and that can have dramatic impacts.

Can the minister please inform this House what our government is doing to assist the municipalities affected and to ensure the safety of the residents?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I want to thank my colleague for the question. The member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan and I are working very closely together to provide whatever support we can to the municipalities that are impacted by this major flooding crisis. There's no question that the enormous amount of rain that resulted in the declarations of emergency by Thunder Bay, Conmee and Oliver Paipoonge required many agencies to work closely together on an urgent basis to deal with this crisis.

Certainly, the Ministry of Natural Resources is playing a vital role in providing up-to-date and immediate information to the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority, the OPP and Ontario Power Generation regarding ever-changing water levels in our area watersheds. Through our Surface Water Monitoring Centre we can accurately monitor and we can predict water levels where flooding may take place, particularly as river and lake levels crest. We will continue to work closely with all of our partners to provide any assistance as requested.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Minister, I thank you for that. There still remains a very serious situation. The ground is saturated. It can't take any more water and we don't know what will happen with the weather over the course of the next several days. If the region is to experience further significant rainfall, it could force water levels to rise very quickly and potentially displace hundreds of residents, creating challenges for emergency vehicles and school buses, and the list goes on.

The residents in the affected communities need to know that they will have somewhere to go in the event that they are displaced. Speaker, through you to the Minister of Natural Resources, what will the government do to ensure that an emergency precautionary plan is in place should the flood situation worsen? Will there be support in place to help the residents of Thunder Bay—Atikokan?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: We always take great interest in emergency declaration. Water flows and levels can become dangerous very quickly and without notice. That's why it is of the utmost importance that Ontarians in the area stay clear of waterways and be careful on roads. All residents should take heed of flood warnings on municipal websites and contact local officials for regular updates.

Emergency Management Ontario will continue to contact the affected communities daily to ensure we can help address any challenges they may face. With that said, EMO will work with our emergency partners, monitor the situation very closely and make the necessary preliminary preparations so we are ready in case the northwestern Ontario flood situation escalates. If need be, the OPP will go door to door to advise people to stay out of a dangerous situation.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Minister of Health. On November 28, emergency dispatchers failed to quickly deploy land ambulances to a site of a fatal helicopter crash in Waterloo region. Even though 911 dispatchers knew the location of the crash three minutes after it happened, it took them 12 minutes to relay that information to emergency crews.

As the Waterloo Region Record recently pointed out, it's easy to imagine scenarios in which the inability to quickly dispatch emergency crews could lead to "a crash victim experiencing needless pain—or even ... dying."

Minister, are you even aware of the problems with emergency dispatching in our community of Kitchener—Waterloo?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What I can tell you is that patient safety is our highest priority when it comes to our health care system and when it comes to our ambulance system. We investigate every incident thoroughly and we investigate it carefully, and where there are changes that

ought to be made, Speaker, we make sure those changes are made.

When it comes to ambulance safety, we understand that response is sometimes a matter of life and death, and we take these situations extremely seriously.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Harris: Again to the minister: Since 2007, Waterloo region council has received seven reports calling for emergency dispatching to be streamlined. One study in 2009 concluded that a streamlined system could reduce emergency response times significantly. In a more recent study, former police chief Larry Gravill called for dispatching services to be handled under one roof, as this would improve information-sharing and response times.

The people of Kitchener–Waterloo need the province to step up to the plate, but as the Waterloo Region Record recently pointed out, so far the Liberal government “has been an unwilling partner” in making the necessary changes to streamline emergency dispatch services.

Minister, will you take action to fix our community's broken emergency dispatch system, or will you continue to give the residents of Kitchener–Waterloo more excuses?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What I can assure the member opposite is that I would be more than happy to work with him to address an issue in his community, as I am with all members of this House, regardless of where in this House they sit.

I can tell you, Speaker, that we are monitoring dispatch response times very closely. We are making improvements to the system. One of those improvements that we're looking very carefully at is simultaneous dispatch so that responders get there as quickly as possible, whether they're fire or EMS.

There's work to be done, and we are doing that work. I'd be more than happy to work with the member opposite.

1110

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Jonah Schein: This question is for the Premier. The government has repeatedly stated that the Eglinton LRT will be completed by 2020, but according to a new review by the American Public Transportation Association, this line won't be in operation until 2022 or 2023. That's because Metrolinx, by going with a P3 model, is shutting down the design of underground stations until they can find a private sector contract that won't be awarded until 2014.

Why is the government putting an untested and ideologically driven preference for a public-private partnership first instead of the goal of getting the LRT completed as soon as possible to provide relief for gridlocked commuters?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member for the question because it is topical in the media.

Metrolinx and Infrastructure Ontario are recognized for their expertise in delivering major transit and transportation projects. Infrastructure Ontario indeed has, over the last five years, completed 55 projects worth \$22 billion, virtually all on time and many of them under budget.

We're extremely proud of the investments we're making in transit. Our Toronto caucus has been able to deliver \$8.4 billion for four transit projects in the city of Toronto. And, Mr. Speaker, it's not all about those four LRT projects either. Transit now under construction in the Toronto area: Toronto-York-Spadina subway extension, Eglinton crosstown, Union Station GO and subway stations, Pearson-Union Station air-rail link, GO Transit Georgetown rail corridor and many others. We're proud of our accomplishments—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jonah Schein: In response to the Minister of Transportation: To the contrary, this government's record on light rail in Toronto is one of false promises, it's one of cutbacks and it's one of delays.

Now Metrolinx's P3 model is causing further delays, not only on the Eglinton line. The American Public Transportation Association review says that construction on the Sheppard East line could start today, instead of 2014, if it wasn't for the requirements of Metrolinx's financing model.

Why won't the government direct Metrolinx to show flexibility in its delivery model and start construction immediately on the Sheppard East line?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The reality is that the TTC, Metrolinx and Infrastructure Ontario are working in partnership to advance these particular projects, which are urgently required. We are determined to deliver these and get the shovels in the ground. We have a deadline that we are going to meet. Metrolinx and Infrastructure Ontario are confident that they can meet that deadline. It is a tight deadline but they're confident that they can meet it.

What we are tired of, Mr. Speaker, is the ideological bent that the NDP want to put on just about every issue. This is not about triple Ps. This is about partnership. It's about tremendous investments in transit in the greater Toronto area. We're proud of it.

We will be on time. We will be under budget.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: My question today is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, I know you've often spoken in this House about the customer service standard for the AODA. This being accessibility week, I am very pleased to ask another question this week about the AODA.

I continue to inform my constituents in Pickering–Scarborough East about all five standards proposed, and the customer service standard one, of course, is already being implemented in our great province.

Could the minister please tell the House more about the employment standard under the AODA?

Hon. John Milloy: I thank the honourable member for the question, and I'm pleased to take this opportunity to inform members of this House about the AODA employment standard. The member's question is a timely one.

The first provision of the employment standard came into effect on January 1 of this year. This provision requires that all organizations work with their employees, including those with disabilities, to determine what kind of information they might need in case of an emergency. The provision further requires that organizations provide their employees with disabilities with emergency response information that's tailored to each employee's needs, and make public emergency information accessible upon request.

As I've often said, Mr. Speaker, this is obviously the right thing to do, but it's also about giving employers the opportunity to tap into a whole pool of individuals, persons with disabilities, who can serve the needs that they have as employers, as employees with their companies.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Tracy MacCharles: Thanks to the minister for sharing this information with the House. It's good to hear that provisions help ensure that all employees, including those with disabilities, are safe in case of an emergency.

I hear from people all the time, in my riding and throughout the province, about the need to increase the employment rates of persons with disabilities. We know that they have higher retention rates and higher education rates. It is about changing attitudes and working towards removing all barriers, including barriers and negative attitudes about persons with disabilities and employment. This is a real opportunity for business, as well as being the right thing to do.

Can the minister please share with the House an example of true accessibility in the workplace?

Hon. John Milloy: I thank the member. Mr. Speaker, at the risk of being parochial, I'd like to cite an example from my own riding of Kitchener Centre. Scott and Jamie Burton of Dolphin Digital Technologies pride themselves on their knowledgeable and skilled team, a team that was built using their own knowledge that inclusive hiring is smart hiring.

Their commitment to hiring the best talent, regardless of disability, and accommodating each employee's unique needs has really paid off. In the last two years, Dolphin has had zero staff turnover and only one sick day taken, numbers that are unheard of for most businesses. Says Jamie of their hiring practices, in a recent interview, "There's a two-and-a-half-times return on investment for hiring a person with a disability. Put aside the myths and look at the benefits."

I'd like to just congratulate Dolphin Digital Technologies for their leadership in this very, very important area.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Todd Smith: It's to the Minister of Finance this morning: Minister, you've done some creative accounting with your government's economic record this week in the House, but here's a number that you can't run away from. It's 16.5—16.5% of Ontarians under 25 are out of work. That's roughly one in every six in the province of Ontario. It's almost three points higher than the national average. I talk to parents all the time, in Prince Edward-Hastings and across the province, whose children are going out to the oil sands, or wherever they can get a job, and it's usually not here in Ontario.

Minister, with one in six young people in Ontario desperate for a job, why did your government bring in a budget that makes it harder to do business in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Youth unemployment here in Ontario and across Canada—indeed, throughout the Western world—is always a challenge; it has been. The numbers are too high. That's why, in this budget, we increased funding for youth employment, summer jobs, and I think that's why we need to pass the budget.

By the way, I remind the member opposite that 42% of new jobs created in Canada have been created here in Ontario. There remains much to be done. We have taken appropriate steps to help with that.

By the way, we're very proud of our investments in education, which you and your party have voted against. A better education, higher graduation rates, more post-secondary achievement: Those are the important determinants of employment for young people. That member and his party have tried to block every one of those important initiatives.

Mr. Todd Smith: It's great to have an educated workforce, but you need the jobs, and we need a Minister of Finance who can create the environment in the province of Ontario so that one out of six isn't going without a job.

The fact is, Minister, you're responsible for Ontario's youth unemployment being roughly twice that of Alberta and Saskatchewan, and six points higher than youth unemployment in the province of British Columbia. The Ontario of opportunity that I moved to 20 years ago and that flourished in the 1990s has become the Ontario of mediocrity because of your tenure as the Minister of Finance.

Minister, why is it acceptable to you that Ontario's youth unemployment is twice that of the western provinces?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This summer, 100,000 students will find work through our summer jobs strategy. There is no doubt that more needs to be done. But what we know is, those important investments in education, whether it is in skills training through our community colleges; through more apprenticeship programs; through higher graduation rates; through higher levels of post-secondary attainment—those are the determinants of long-term growth and short-term jobs for our young people.

There remains much to be done. We remain committed to these important concepts. The young people of Ontario know that they have a friend in this government.

1120

BEAR CONTROL

Ms. Sarah Campbell: To the Minister of Natural Resources: Earlier this month, the Minister of Natural Resources announced the cancellation of the Bear Wise trapping and relocation program without notice. At that time, the minister said police organizations would take over the responsibility for emergency bear calls, something that the police immediately denied. Since the cancellation of the trapping and relocation program, there have been close calls in North Bay, Timmins and even Burlington.

On the Victoria Day weekend, residents of Sioux Lookout frantically called both the MNR and police with reports of at least one dangerous bear, and for 24 hours nobody responded. As expected, the bear attacked a person.

Minister, your decision to cancel the program without an alternate plan in place has jeopardized public safety. Will you agree today to reverse that decision?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thanks very much for the question. Certainly the Bear Wise program does continue, and may I say, Ontario is the only province that actually has a Bear Wise program at all. We are continuing to support it, obviously, through the work our MNR technicians are doing and the other work that we're doing, working with our provincial police and with our local police forces. And may I say, we do have a protocol, working with the OPP and local police forces, that if there is indeed an emergency, people should call the local police. I understand that they'll be working closely with all those people in the municipalities.

May I also say—perhaps I'll respond in the supplementary—but in terms of the situation that happened north of Sioux Lookout, obviously our concerns go out to the gentleman who was attacked by the bear. I look forward to having an opportunity in the supplementary to speak more specifically to that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Minister, we know what happened. The Bear Wise hotline even acknowledged they've received a number of calls from residents but still did nothing.

Residents across northern Ontario are scared for their safety. For example, children in Sioux Lookout are being forced to stay indoors at recess because of public safety concerns.

Minister, you have offered no solutions or alternatives. The problem will not go away on its own. Will you reinstate the trapping and relocation program today until such a time as a realistic plan is in place to ensure public safety?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Certainly, it's important for me to point out immediately that indeed, if it's deter-

mined by the police that there's a situation where the trapping or the tranquilizing, immobilizing of a bear is necessary, our bear technicians and our senior staff will be there to work with the local police. In all those situations, we are going to continue to do that. Again, we are the only province that has that problem.

In terms of the situation that happened north of Sioux Lookout, the member knows this well. It happened 100 kilometres north of Sioux Lookout. Certainly that would be described as bear country. There would have been no ability for anyone to get up there to deal with that situation. The gentleman was in a specific situation where the bear managed to get to him.

But as always, our people will be there. Our ministry will be there. Our—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: —will be there when the police determine that indeed an emergency situation is occurring. We'll be there to work with them, with the community and others to see the situation is handled as best as it can be.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Ontarians are facing a new challenge that requires them to have the right skills and talents to thrive in our new economy. That's why we need to focus on identifying underserved labour markets, so we can help Ontario train for high-demands jobs.

I've met with several constituents in my riding that need to change their jobs. Some Ontarians are looking for new employment or working fewer than 20 hours per week. This often puts an individual in a difficult position, requiring them to find several part-time jobs at a lower pay scale and below their skill level. Our government could help these Ontarians by providing the support they require to upgrade and acquire new skills.

Speaker, through you to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities: How is the minister going to ensure that we prepare our workers for the right job with the right amount of government support?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank the member for his question and also for his advocacy in his constituency on this, because I know he has raised the awareness quite significantly in his community amongst displaced workers.

Mr. Speaker, we have a very excellent program that has been imitated now in many parts of the US and other parts of the world, which is called Second Career. During the global recession out of the US, I think many of us are aware that many people lost their jobs. We've recovered over 500,000 jobs, but a quarter of a million Ontarians lost jobs during that. Eighty-one percent of those people who lost jobs did not have a high school education. While we have several hundred thousand jobs now created net of that, we have to upskill the people who lost their workforce to get some college or university

education. We have about 62,000 people right now who get \$28,000 to go to our excellent colleges, universities and private career colleges to get re-skilled for the job market.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Mr. Speaker, it's truly unfortunate to see hard-working people who are committed to supporting their families and communities be put out of work. But we live in a global, competitive economy, and that's why it's important for our government to attract and retain good jobs in Ontario.

Our government must be effective in immediately providing assistance to workers hard hit by layoffs and plant closures so they can quickly access the existing Employment Ontario programs and service. We set up action centres where recently laid-off workers go to receive employment and training services. They are generally the result of a contract agreement reached between our government and the company, as well as the union representing the workers and the community.

How can laid-off workers access Second Career through the action centres we've set up to help workers find employment and training services?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We have over 300 employment service offices in Ontario that are in every single rural, northern and urban community in the south, and they can apply there.

We are investing over \$1 billion a year in employment programs, to great success. As a matter of fact, right now there are more than 55,000 folks in the Second Career program alone. This has an excellent track record because three out of four people who go through this program get a higher-paying job. I think that's an incredible accomplishment. This is also helping the federal government, which wants to get people back to work.

Simply demanding that people take jobs that are low-paying jobs means they're likely going to be back unemployed again. Our strategy is to actually raise the skill level, get people better-paying jobs, increase higher income earning and get people back. I think the contrast between the Conservative approach and our approach is dramatic, and I'm hoping we can work with the federal government to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

PENSION PLANS

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is to the Minister of Finance. The McGuinty government is denying Ontarians the ability to opt into pooled registered pension plans. Instead, the government says that increasing mandatory CPP contributions is the best way to go. The CFIB is advocating for PRPPs instead of mandatory CPP hikes.

Minister, your government is not interested in giving Ontario employees a chance to join a pooled registered model. Why don't you trust Ontarians to make their own decisions, or are you convinced that increasing job-killing CPP premiums is the right choice?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, we are quite prepared, as I indicated in the budget in clear and unequivocal terms, to bring forward enabling legislation on PRPPs, provided Canada deals with Canada pension and provides modest enhancements so that more Ontarians will have a more secure retirement. Mr. Speaker, 70% of Ontarians do not have a pension today. It is important that we build on the successes of Canada pension as we offer Ontarians and all Canadians more opportunities for savings.

I will also point out to the member opposite that more than \$900 billion of unused RRSP room is currently present in this country. PRPPs represent one additional alternative for choice, but until the other provinces, and the federal government particularly, get serious about improving the Canada pension plan, we won't pass the enabling legislation. It's right; it's responsible; it's about a better future for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Minister, 60% of Canadians have no workplace pension plan, so your suggestion of enhancing CPP will not affect them. PRPPs are designed to address this gap in the retirement income system by providing an accessible, large-scale and low-cost defined contribution pension option to employers, employees and the self-employed.

Can the minister explain why he is treating Ontarians this way by not providing the opportunity to opt in and instead asking businesses to pay higher CPP premiums?

1130

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We have cut business taxes by a third. We have cut the small business tax rate. I say to the CFIB that the people who are going to shop in your stores and go to your restaurants in the coming years are going to be older Canadians. We need modest enhancements to the Canada pension plan. We are quite supportive of these kinds of alternatives. It's only Alberta and the federal government that are refusing to move on Canada pension plan reforms. Our sister provinces have indicated a willingness to look at that.

That member and her party ought to stand up and do what's right instead of advocating for cuts to old age security, which Conservatives want to do, which will impact the treasury and put more seniors on welfare in later years. This is all well documented. Take a balanced, whole approach to the question of pensions and post-retirement income, which will serve all Canadians well in the future if we simply have the strength of mind and courage to take the right steps today.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you will know that the mayors of northeastern Ontario have been wanting to meet with you in order to discuss the move to privatize the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission. Are you prepared, as Premier, to actually meet with the mayors, as per their request?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I'm very happy to say that I met with the mayors on April 19 and committed to them that they would have a technical briefing from Infrastructure Ontario. They had that technical briefing. We committed to another meeting on June 13. We will live up to our commitment to meet with the mayors. I will meet with the mayors at any time to discuss their ideas with regard to divestment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Premier, it's clear that what the mayors are asking for is not a meeting with your minister, because we know what the minister is up to. He's about divesting the ONTC and moving ahead with that particular initiative.

The mayors of northeastern Ontario, the people who have been elected in cities from North Bay to Hearst, have asked to meet with you because they represent the people of northeastern Ontario and those communities. So I ask you again, Premier: You are the decision-maker in your cabinet. You're the one who makes the decision. Are you prepared to meet with the mayors of northeastern Ontario as Premier? Yes or no?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Let me reinforce that I will meet with the mayors at any time to discuss divestment. That decision has been made. We look forward to their involvement, their ideas. There are opportunities that are presented to them with regard to divestment.

But I do find it passing strange that that member would ask this question, because when he was part of a government that was going through difficult times, what did they do? They slashed operating dollars to the ONTC. They slashed capital dollars to the ONTC. They slashed subsidy dollars to the ONTC. They stopped—shut down—Star Transfer, the transport company of the ONTC, and fired the workers. They cut back on the air service to 15 communities in northern Ontario. I find it very, very strange that this member would stand up and pretend to support the ONTC at this time.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Minister, your ministry does work that affects the everyday lives of employers and employees in this province. Each Ontarian who goes to work every day and holds a job has an investment in your legislation and enforcement activities.

To ensure that both the employers and employees comply with the law and enjoy the full benefits of their rights, they should have access to the latest information on the new developments and initiatives by your ministry. However, communication with such a large audience is a difficult challenge. Minister, what kind of online initiatives has your ministry developed to reach out and educate Ontario workers and employees?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I want to thank the member for the question. The Ministry of Labour works very hard to

maintain a strong, current online presence, reaching out in a variety of channels.

Our ministry website is a great repository for information, explaining legislation and enforcement activities in plain language. Our employment standards tools have been used over one million times since 2009. Both our website and our YouTube channel visitors can find an ongoing series of interactive videos as well as interactive Web tools. The videos explain how health and safety inspectors conduct various workplace initiatives, and outline employment standards rights and how to file a claim with the ministry as well.

I invite everybody to visit the Ministry of Labour's website and explore how they can stay better informed on labour issues.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

There are a few points of order at the moment, so I'm going to recognize those who have requested it.

VISITORS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Earlier during question period, students from Ascension of Our Lord Secondary School from Bramalea–Gore–Malton were here. I notice they've left now, but I wanted to introduce them to the House.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'd like to introduce Mr. Larry Palmer, who's the executive director of Camphill Communities Ontario in Angus, and Kevin Greenfield. They won lunch with their MPP at the Community Living Association for South Simcoe golf tournament. Congratulations, gentlemen.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to point out that in the west gallery a very good friend of mine and the former MPP for the old riding of Quinte is here, Doug Rollins.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: This afternoon at 3 o'clock, I'll have, in the Speaker's gallery, a very remarkable and inspirational young woman I'd like to invite all of you to meet. Her name is Hélène Campbell. She is my constituent from Barhaven. Of course, many of you have probably heard about her in recent weeks for gaining attention for organ donation and being successful with her organ donation transplant with a double lung transplant. Speaker, she'll be in your gallery at 3 o'clock.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further to that, that also means you'll stay within the one-minute-and-30-second statement.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You're just teasing.

Mr. Bill Walker: Speaker, earlier in the introduction of guests, I announced that the Hanover Holy Family school was here. They're not on the premises yet, and it's in fact not until the 12th. So I would like to withdraw that, and I'll reintroduce them when they are here. I'm a keeper.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I actually got a little dizzy on that one. It is the tradition of the Speaker to acknowledge former members, so I too would want to reiterate—Mr. Doug Rollins from Quinte in the 36th Parliament. Welcome, as always.

There are no deferred votes, so this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Bill Walker: I promise they're here today, Speaker. I would like to introduce Bill Herron and Steve Eby from the Ontario Cattlemen's Association, more specifically the Grey and Bruce cattlemen's association. I believe they will be joining us in the gallery momentarily.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'd like to introduce a good friend of mine, Nathan Shaw, from Ancaster. Nathan, as some of you may recall, was instrumental in helping us fight together for the presumptive legislation with firefighters. So, Nathan, welcome. I'd like everyone to join in welcoming Nathan here today.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: In mere moments I will be doing a statement on the individual who is in your Speaker's box, but I would like my colleagues across the House to welcome today double lung transplant recipient H       Campbell and her brave mother, Manon.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome. The member from, um, Northumberland-Quinte West.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thought you would know that by heart by now.

I'd like to introduce to the chamber this afternoon Jim and Drinda Michaud, as well as their lovely daughter, Serina, and their son, Josh. Thank you very much for coming here.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to introduce Georgia Koumantaros, Constantine Ttofias and Manak Mann, our guests today.

REPORT, INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table a report from the Integrity Commissioner entitled Report of the Review of Expense Claims Covering the Period April 1, 2011, to March 31, 2012, Pursuant to the Cabinet Ministers' and Opposition Leaders' Expenses Review and Accountability Act, 2002.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

H       CAMPBELL

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The name H       Campbell has become synonymous with organ donation awareness. After a health setback last year, a double lung transplant for H       was necessary. As she waited for a donor, with each breath becoming more difficult, H       found her voice, and what an inspirational voice it has become.

Captivating our nation's capital, H      , with failing health, rallied Ottawa. Her organ donation campaign hit

the Ottawa Citizen. It then soon became a clarion call by radio host Mauler of Hot 89.9. Soon, H       mobilized Justin Bieber and Ellen DeGeneres. I know what you're all going to say: "No big deal," right?

Never once throughout H      's ordeal did she ever ask, "Why me?" Instead, she has handled herself with grace and dignity, putting her cause before her own fears. She simply asked, "How can I help?" And she did. The Trillium Gift of Life Network attributes H      's campaign to a 2% increase in organ donation registration, growing by 8,000 people in Ottawa alone, creating what has been dubbed the H       Campbell effect.

Nepean-Carleton residents are particularly proud of our hometown hero. For her steadfast contribution to organ donation awareness, I nominated H       for a Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. Last week she was presented with this honour by the Prime Minister himself. Later today I'll take her to meet Ontario's Premier, and just moments ago she met with Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's loyal opposition leader.

But above all, I can say this: H       has had that double lung transplant, and unlike the day that she first joined me at Queen's Park in January, lugging two very large oxygen tanks, just mere months ago, she's here today, breathing on her own. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in supporting Be a Donor.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. We obviously all welcome our special guests for being here.

ANNALEISE CARR

Mr. Toby Barrett: You know, we're blessed with special young people who donate their time as legislative pages. One young person hopes to set a world record as the youngest to swim across Lake Ontario, and I speak of Annaleise Rebekah Carr, the page standing by the entrance door, a grade 8 student at Walsh Public School.

Fourteen-year-old Annaleise is a proud member of the Norfolk Hammerheads in Simcoe and the North Shore Runners/Swimmers in Port Dover. Ms. Carr became involved with our local Camp Trillium-Rainbow Lake last summer when she and nine others completed the 10-kilometre open-water swim from Pottahawk Point to Turkey Point, followed by a 10-kilometre run. They raised \$15,000. As she states on her website, "You see, the camp exists for children with cancer and their families—a sort of haven away from what they are going through."

Annaleise then set her sights for this Labour Day weekend and a Lake Ontario crossing following the traditional Marilyn Bell route from Niagara-on-the-Lake to the CNE. She says, "I've been blessed to be able to swim a long way and I want to use that gift to help the kids and their families at Camp Trillium."

Speaker, please join me in recognizing a future world record holder, Annaleise Carr. Congratulations. All the best.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. We do have some very wonderful young people here today.

BOMBARDIER

Mr. Bill Mauro: Today is Wednesday, May 30, but just a few days ago back in Thunder Bay, on Friday, May 25, we had another great announcement at the Bombardier plant in my riding. I was fortunate to have the Premier in Thunder Bay with me, along with my colleague from Thunder Bay–Superior North, and we announced another very, very large contract for the Bombardier plant there. On Friday, we announced a \$200-million contract for 60 more GO Transit bi-level cars here to service southwestern Ontario. Those cars are valued at over \$3 million per unit, and each one of those cars represents about 10,000 hours of work per unit. This is closely connected to the platform commitment we made last year promising two-way, all-day GO Transit service in southern Ontario.

This brings the total contract value, of the total contracts awarded to Bombardier and Thunder Bay, to somewhere around \$3.5 billion. Of that, about \$1.5 billion or \$1.6 billion has come from the provincial government.

When we were elected in 2003, the Bombardier plant there in Thunder Bay had about 250 people working in it. Today there are 1,300 people working in that plant in Thunder Bay. While we were at the announcement, the senior management team told me that they are currently looking to hire 140 more employees, bringing the total employment to over 1,400 people: great news for the workers, great news for the plant, great news for Thunder Bay, and great news for the economy of northwestern Ontario.

COMMERCIAL FILL

Mr. John O'Toole: I rise today with an update on commercial fill in the region of Durham.

In Scucog township, and indeed Uxbridge, Lakeridge Citizens for Clean Water have advocated strongly for protection of the Oak Ridges moraine and our local water resources. Citizens who live near the Morgans Road site in Clarington are equally strong advocates who have offered several suggestions to safeguard communities in Durham region and indeed throughout Ontario.

I'd like to thank Beth Meszaros and Donna Middleton of Clarington Citizens for Clean Water and Soil for keeping me informed. Thanks also to Ian McLaurin of Lakeridge Citizens for Clean Water and Gerri Lynn O'Connor, the mayor of Uxbridge, as well as the council there.

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The concern is that conservation authorities and municipalities simply don't have the human or financial resources to properly manage or monitor the placement of commercial fill. Citizens are telling me they want a

central authority, like the Ministry of Natural Resources, to oversee commercial fill permits.

The review of the Aggregate Resources Act is an excellent forum to address commercial fill based on former gravel pits and quarries, pits being the destination of this material, and we want to ensure that it is indeed clean. Changing the Aggregate Resources Act to encompass the future use of commercial fill would provide a comprehensive strategy for a lifetime solution to this question. Commercial fill affects water quality and local environment, traffic, land values, and generally the quality of life of citizens. Let's do the right thing.

ADULT LEARNERS

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Last week I attended a graduation ceremony in my riding, London–Fanshawe. While many of us participate in events such as these in our communities, this particular ceremony stood out and touched me on a personal level.

The graduation celebration I attended at G.A. Wheable adult centre is for adult learners who are completing their high school diploma. Seeing the pride of accomplishment on their faces and those of their families filled me with inspiration and hope, and I am pleased to share that experience with everyone here. I was truly moved when I realized how courageous these adult graduates are. It is never easy to admit what you don't know, and to return to school as an adult is a very intimidating concept.

I further want to thank and acknowledge the Thames Valley District School Board alternative education program. The programs offered by the Thames Valley District School Board provide adults with the opportunity to address their academic, social and emotional needs in a non-threatening environment so that education can become a priority in their lives.

I congratulate the graduates and the educators of the Thames Valley District School Board and the G.A. Wheable adult learning centre for their extraordinary efforts towards lifelong learning at any age.

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Phil McNeely: I rise today to recognize the fundraising efforts of two groups of students in my riding of Ottawa–Orléans. On May 3, the students of Cairine Wilson Secondary School in Orléans held their ninth annual Relay for Life event, during which they raised \$52,000.

For the second year in a row, student Kelly McGruer was the top fundraiser, with over \$2,980 in contributions, while the Ancient Greeks took home first-place honours in the team competition, with a combined total of \$5,153. The money raised will be used to help fund clinical trials and other cancer research. The event included a lap of honour during which the students were able to pay their respect to 26 cancer survivors who came out to thank the students for their efforts in helping to fight cancer. This year's event was once again dedicated to Hannah

Billings, a local resident who lost her life to cancer in 2007 at the age of nine.

On May 10, the students of St. Peter High School in Fallingbrook capped off their annual food drive by delivering over 32,000 items to the Orléans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre. The resource centre's emergency food program serves nearly 500 clients every month, and the items collected by the students at St. Peter's go a long way to help the centre meet this demand.

Students from Cornwall to Kenora raise millions of dollars every year for a variety of worthy causes, and for that we are tremendously grateful.

REPEAL OF PROHIBITION

Mr. Randy Hillier: Tomorrow will mark the 85th anniversary of the repeal of Prohibition in Ontario. Thomas Reed once opined, "One of the greatest delusions in the world is the hope that the evils in this world are to be cured by legislation." In the difficult years of World War I, members of the temperance movement forgot Mr. Reed's dictum, and Ontario banned the sale of alcohol. For eight years, between 1916 and 1924, the people of Ontario were prohibited from drinking their favourite beers, wines and spirits. For eight years, our traditions of individual liberty were squashed, and criminal activity flourished in the trade and smuggling of spirits. Indeed, in hindsight, Prohibition was an unfortunate error in our history.

In 1924, following a referendum, Prohibition was replaced with our current system of dealing with alcohol. Today, people across Ontario have a lacklustre choice in alcohol for purchase. Today, our citizens pay exorbitant taxes and inflated costs to prop up government-protected monopolies that deny consumers choice.

Though our 1924 referendum was a step in the right direction, for it repealed the failed eight-year experiment with Prohibition by empowering people through referendums, this government has fallen back into the failures of a nanny state once again.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, increasingly, I am encountering a problem in my riding of tenants who are being pressed to pay for air conditioning.

Tenants in my riding living in apartment buildings built 30, 40 years ago, buildings that were not intended to be cooled in the summer, buildings that were built to deal with harsh winters, are now finding that they can't use their units without air conditioning. Many of them are low-income seniors. They are being pressed by landlords to pay 40 bucks a month for use of the hydro for their air conditioning. They don't have it.

Speaker, they need to know that this government will listen to their complaints when they call the Ministry of Housing; that, in fact, they will be backed up.

Beyond that, we are going to have to recognize that as this climate gets hotter, the building stock that we have is not appropriately designed. We are going to have to be making changes so that people won't be driven out of their homes either by the heat or by costs for cooling that they can't afford.

ONTARIO CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I am very pleased to be able to rise today to welcome the members of the Ontario Cattlemen's Association, who are visiting Queen's Park as part of their annual day at the Legislature. The Ontario Cattlemen's Association, or OCA, is a grassroots organization that provides leadership to cattlemen from all sectors of the industry.

I'm sure that many members of this House enjoyed some of their fine Ontario beef today during lunch out on the front lawn. There was a lineup out there that went not quite all the way around the building, but certainly a large part of the way around the front quadrangle out there. I'm sure many of you also had an opportunity to meet with the cattlemen already today—or later in the afternoon.

All of the members of this House would be pleased to acknowledge the work that the cattlemen do so that Ontarians can enjoy delicious, locally produced beef.

To the consumers out there, to the people who like fine dining, if you're thinking of what to put on the barbecue this summer, give yourself a real treat and try Ontario corn-fed beef. It's amazing, folks.

To everyone involved in the OCA and to the 19,000 beef producers who are members of the organization, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the OCA on your 50th anniversary this year and welcome you to Queen's Park today.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 13, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to bullying and other matters / *Projet de loi 13, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation en ce qui a trait à l'intimidation et à d'autres questions.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted. Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to the order of the House dated May 3, 2012, the bill is ordered for third reading.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, as you know, the McGuinty government is committed to supporting people who contribute to Ontario's agri-food industry. We want to help to create new jobs, market opportunities and promote our province's food businesses to the world.

That is why I was pleased to recently attend, along with Quebec's Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Pierre Corbeil, the SIAL Canada trade show in Montreal. The event is one of North America's most important meeting places for the food industry and showcases Canada's great agri-food sector.

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SIAL Canada attracted over 13,000 visitors from more than 45 countries to 650-plus booths. It's an opportunity for our agri-food businesses to expand their markets and build relationships with colleagues from around the world.

While I was at SIAL, I was pleased to recognize excellence in the industry by presenting the Ontario Food Exporter Award to Boris Serebryany, president and CEO of Fiera Foods. Fiera Foods began 25 years ago as a two-man bakery. Today, it employs over 1,000 workers in four manufacturing facilities in the GTA and produces two-million-plus croissants and bagels a day. It's probably the largest croissant-maker in the world. It has built its success through innovation and by exporting new products to the United States, Asia, Europe and Australia.

In addition to congratulating Fiera Foods, I also want to recognize the other two award finalists, Pillitteri Estates Winery and Erie Meat Products Ltd., because their achievements are also so outstanding.

Pillitteri Estates is a family-owned winery that has been internationally recognized for its premium wines. It is the world's largest estate ice-wine producer and number one in estate winery exports, now exporting to more than 30 countries worldwide.

Let me tell you about Erie Meat Products. They specialize in the further processing of poultry, beef, and pork products. In the past two years, this company has specifically targeted emerging markets and has increased its export reach to 16 new countries spanning five continents.

Success stories like these helped Ontario's agri-food exports hit a record high of almost \$10 billion in 2011. It's success stories like these that contribute to a stronger economy and create jobs for farmers and families.

Ontario's agriculture and food industry is truly a cornerstone of our economy, and we're working very hard to keep it that way. We will continue to recognize and support innovation and advances in this industry.

Interjection: Really? Really?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: So please join me in congratulating the achievements of these Ontario businesses and

all the fine people who work hard to make our agri-food sector strong. Yes, really.

SUPERVISED ACCESS

Hon. John Gerretsen: I rise in the House today to speak to you about a great, non-partisan program that has literally touched and helped the lives of thousands of Ontario children affected by the divorce and separation of their parents, and that's the Ontario supervised access program.

Anyone who has been through family breakdown knows that it can be incredibly hard on everyone involved—the spouses, the partners, the children. It is an emotional time, a confusing time and a time of great upheaval; a time when an individual's life, particularly a child's life, can change forever. While times like these are difficult for spouses who have shared a part of their lives together, for children, these changes can be particularly devastating.

Thankfully, Ontario's family law system is amongst the best in Canada. Our focus on upfront information and mediation services has meant that questions of child custody and access can often be settled in a fairly quick and straightforward manner. But, Speaker, sometimes that can't happen and it doesn't happen.

As we all know, family matters can be infinitely complex, and every family situation is different and unique. Sometimes the hurt, the anger and the emotional upheaval can get in the way of finding that common ground that is necessary for an equitable solution. And so, when parents can't see eye to eye on the custody and access of their children and there is a risk to either the parent or the child, Ontario's families can turn to the supervised access program.

Speaker, I can tell you from my own experience as a family lawyer back in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s that this kind of program simply didn't exist, or at best was done on an ad hoc basis. Today, available in every court district across the province, supervised access provides a safe neutral site for visits and exchanges.

It's a program that has kept parents and children connected when family turmoil would otherwise keep them apart. Despite the personal troubles or conflicts between former spouses, non-custodial parents and their children often want to maintain that connection, and supervised access makes this possible.

I'm proud to say that the supervised access program has recently marked a very important milestone. It's been 20 years since the government began funding this valuable service in Ontario. I am proud to say that this government has continued to invest in these services, which has meant more locations available, extended hours of service, improved facilities and better staff training. Today, 103 centres facilitate over 70,000 visits and exchanges each and every year, benefiting more than 2,700 children in this province annually. This is an important collective achievement.

There are many success stories that are truly heart-warming, and I will name just a couple of them:

—the story of a particularly nervous young father from St. Thomas who required some coaching from the local staff before he could summon the courage to meet his two-year-old daughter and was pleasantly surprised when she not only appeared to recognize him but reached out to him with open arms;

—or the dad from Simcoe who, after four years of absence, has been reunited with his son and now uses the local supervised access centre for regular visits.

Of course, for many young people, supervised access provides their only link to non-custodial parents throughout their childhood, and many staff and volunteers have literally watched these children grow up and mature.

Recently, a group of three adult siblings returned to tell staff in Durham region how grateful they were to have had the opportunity to get to know their father better in their formative years, and that would not have been possible without the supervised access program being in place. They credited their experience as one that has positively influenced their lives. As a matter of fact, they have been inspired to pursue careers in family therapy, criminal law and one of them in medicine.

I think we can all take pride in these kinds of stories, because the success of supervised access is one that we share on both sides of the House after two decades of investment and support of this very worthwhile program.

Now, our success here in Ontario has not gone unnoticed. It's a testament to our leadership that the governments of Quebec, Manitoba, Alberta, Yukon, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia have turned to us for advice in establishing their own supervised access programs, as have New Mexico, California and New Hampshire in the United States, and Australia and New Zealand within the Commonwealth.

Moving forward, we have partnered with the University of Toronto and the federal government to develop new tools that will better ensure the safety of children and parents during these supervised exchanges, and we look forward to receiving the results of that research in the near future.

I would like to thank all members of this House and all those individuals who have been involved in these programs for their ongoing support of safe supervised access and visitations in Ontario communities. I encourage you to join me in celebrating this important and collective achievement of 20 years of supervised access here in Ontario.

1530

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Responses?

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to respond to the statement by the Minister of Agriculture, and I want to recognize the recipients of the awards for their hard work. I want to recognize all of Ontario's farmers and food processors for the great products that we sell to the world. It's great to see these products being marketed and the exports growing.

Ontario's food and beverage industry is the largest customer for our farmers, buying 70% of their production. They also employ approximately 110,000 Ontarians. However, we need to ensure that Ontario is a good place for these companies to operate, and many of them have been clear: Right now, government policies are holding them back. When it becomes easier and cheaper for an international company to operate in another jurisdiction, they move and take their jobs with them. We've seen that repeatedly, but the government refuses to acknowledge the impact of their policies.

The Alliance of Ontario Food Processors says, "Without a different approach, Ontario's second largest manufacturing industry will watch its contribution to the economy and society of Ontario erode as international competitors move further ahead in both productivity and innovation." One step they recommended is to provide one-window access for government for the agri-food sector. The government committed to that one-window access in the last election, but so far they've taken no action to implement the one-window approach to fix the red tape problem.

Farmers in agribusiness tell us they can't get a straight answer from the government on all the steps required to expand, so many of them are just choosing not to. We have farmers and businesses that are being buried in red tape, and this government isn't taking any real action to deal with the problem.

The CFIB study released earlier this year found that 67% of their members said that red tape had actually increased over the last three years. Businesses are telling us that the red tape makes it difficult to compete with companies in other jurisdictions.

I want to acknowledge the great work our food and beverage manufacturers do, and I hope that the government will do more to ensure that our companies are competitive and can stay and share great Ontario products with the rest of the world.

SUPERVISED ACCESS

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to stand today and recognize safe supervised visitation month on behalf of Tim Hudak and the Progressive Conservative caucus.

The unfortunate reality is that some parents, when they separate or divorce, need to have safe visits with their children because it becomes a problem, for many reasons. Supervised visitation centres provide that safe haven for children and parents during parental visitations.

This past November, I had the pleasure of celebrating the 10-year anniversary of one such centre in my riding of Dufferin-Caledon: the Headwaters Family Visit Centre. They offer, with the help of staff and volunteers, a safe, neutral and child-focused setting for visits that ensures the safety of all participants. Headwaters Family Visit Centre is an excellent example of what safe supervised visitation month is all about.

Coping with parental divorce or separation is difficult enough for a child without the added stress of being

caught in the middle of parental conflict. When there is animosity between parents, difficulties can arise when exchanges or visits occur. In some cases, the child's safety can even be an issue. Supervised visits and supervised exchanges are designed to ensure children have safe contact with a parent without being put in the middle of conflicts. This makes access easier and, most importantly, reduces tension and stress for the child and the parents involved. Initiatives like safe supervised visitation month help raise awareness and ensure people know supervised visitation and exchange services are available to help them through a difficult time.

I urge all my colleagues in the House to recognize and support safe supervised visitation month and the Ontario families these visitations help each and every day.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. John Vanthof: It's my pleasure to respond to the Minister of Agriculture.

On behalf of the Ontario New Democratic Party, I would like to recognize Fiera Foods, the proud winner of the award of excellence for agri-food export in Ontario. This award was presented to Boris Serebryany, president and CEO of Fiera Foods, at the Salon international de l'alimentation, SIAL Canada, in Montreal.

Fiera Foods was founded in 1987 by Mr. Serebryany and Mr. Alex Garber, when they sold their first order of mini Danish bites. Today, they have over 1,000 employees working at their facilities in Toronto. Their main lines include bakery items, from frozen dough to thaw-and-serve products. The reason for their continued success in this very competitive market is best described by their vision statement, which reads: "Our Vision is Clear—Expect Only the Best!"

The annual SIAL international food expo is one of North America's leading food professional meeting places, with over 13,000 visitors from 45 countries annually. The 2013 show will be held right here in Toronto, from April 30 to May 2, 2013, at the Direct Energy Centre.

For companies like Fiera Foods to produce their high-end products, they depend on Ontario's farmers and primary processors to provide them with top-quality ingredients.

From the wheat farmer in New Liskeard to the flour miller in Hanover to the Fiera bakery in Toronto, New Democrats would like to salute all those people who make great Ontario-grown-and-processed food available to be enjoyed by families not only in Ontario but around the world.

SUPERVISED ACCESS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I am pleased to respond to the Attorney General's comments today. On behalf of the Ontario New Democratic Party, we are very happy to join in the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the supervised access program here in Ontario, as well as

joining in the celebration of the supervised visitation awareness month in general.

It's very important to note that this is an essential service, so we must thank all the staff and all the organizers of these facilities which provide a very essential service, which is allowing children who are the innocent victims of domestic disputes, separations or divorces the opportunity to have access to and to spend time with their family: their father, their mother, their loved ones.

It is particularly important for us to recognize that there is a connection between those families from a lower socio-economic background and the families that take part or access these services; 70% to 90% of families that use visitation centres are in the low-income bracket. It's particularly important for us to recognize that those community members who are less well off, who are more vulnerable, are those who often find themselves in these positions, and children are the innocent victims.

For a child to grow up to be a successful member of society, to be a contributing member of society, it is incumbent that they have access to their loved ones, that they receive the guidance and the parental supervision and wisdom from their loved ones. We must ensure that we take more effort and provide more services up front so that children don't end up falling through the cracks and end up falling into a prison industrial complex, which is the wrong direction for our resources. We should put our resources into taking care of children, educating them, caring for them, allowing for them to have opportunities to access their family and ensure that they have a bright future, as opposed to providing for incarceration for juveniles, incarceration for adults, who then fall through the cracks and end up falling into criminal activity.

These types of services and programs are the right types of programs. We need more of this. We need more services and programs that address those individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds to ensure that we have a society that protects those who are vulnerable, so that we can prevent problems before they occur.

Instead of being a reactive society, let's become a proactive society and protect people, protect our children, protect our future. They are our most precious asset, our most precious and valuable resource, and let's give them the attention that they deserve.

PETITIONS

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the horse racing industry employs approximately 60,000 people, creates \$1.5 billion in wages and \$2 billion in recurring expenditures annually; and

"Whereas the partnership that was created between government and the horse breeding and racing industry

has been a model arrangement and is heralded throughout North America, with 75% of revenues going to the provincial government to fund important programs like health care and education, 5% to the municipalities and only 20% goes back to the horse business; and

"Whereas the horse business is a significant source of revenue for the farming community and rural municipalities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Finance continue the revenue-sharing partnership with the horse racing industry for the benefit of Ontario's agricultural and rural economies."

I support this petition, will sign my name and send it with page Sam.

1540

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: As a part of awareness, I'm presenting 1,000 or more petitions a day. Today I'm presenting 1,081 petitions. The petition reads as follows:

"Auto Insurance Reform Needed: Protect Consumers.

"Whereas auto insurance rates are too high in the province of Ontario and continue to increase;

"Whereas families across the greater Toronto area ... are facing unfair insurance premiums that have more to do with where they live than their accident history or driving ability; and

"Whereas insurance premiums across the GTA differ by as much as 150% for drivers with the same driving record;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Legislative Assembly undertake auto insurance reform that protects consumers, ensuring that premiums are based on a fair assessment of a driver's known ability and history, rather than unfairly targeting drivers on the basis of where they live."

I fully agree with this petition and will affix my name to it and present it to page Louis.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas subsection 6(2)8 of the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act identifies dental hygienists as persons deemed to be qualified to operate an X-ray machine; and

"Whereas dental hygienists need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their patients and clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

"We, the dental hygienists working in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by the member from Richmond Hill that asks the

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act and bring it to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and clients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I fully agree with these petitions and sign them and pass them on to page Hannah.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Bill 13 is unnecessary as an anti-bullying measure because Ontarians already have Bill 157; and

"Whereas Bill 13 promotes radical revisions to school instruction on sex and gender that a majority of parents do not support; and

"Whereas Bill 13 fails to provide any protection for students of faith or students of distinct physical characteristics;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To vote against Bill 13 or to so amend Bill 13 as to equally protect all students, including students of faith."

I'll send this with the page.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I have a petition here from Zero Carbon Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas global climate change is the most serious threat facing humanity and poses significant risks to our environment, economy, society and human health; and

"More than 97% of scientists working in the disciplines contributing to studies of our climate and all national science academies accept that climate change is almost certainly being caused by human activities, mainly due to the use of fossil fuels; and

"The objective of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is 'stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system'; and

"Climate scientists are now warning us that limiting global temperature increase to 1.5 Celsius is essential; and

"Ontario has a clear responsibility to reduce our emissions given that our per capita greenhouse gas emissions are among the highest in the world; and

"With the introduction of the Green Energy Act and feed-in-tariff program, Ontario is an example to the rest of the world of the principle of renewable energy development; and

"The best research today indicates that energy demands are decreasing and that sufficient potential energy from a diverse supply of renewable sources exists to meet Ontario's current and projected energy demands;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Immediately prepare a plan that requires that 100% of Ontario's stationary energy be from zero-carbon sources before the end of 2023, with a timeline to be audited annually by the Auditor General and published reports."

I affix my signature and send it to the table via page Tameem.

SCHOOL CLOSURE

Mr. Taras Natyshak: On behalf of families and parents and students in my riding around the Ruthven Public School area:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Education is proposing the closing of Ruthven Public School; and

"Whereas closing Ruthven Public School is premature at this time due to the improved economic conditions that the Ruthven area is currently experiencing; and

"Whereas Statistics Canada census reveals that the town of Kingsville is one of the few municipalities experiencing a positive growth rate over the last five years; and

"Whereas this school closure will negatively impact the future growth of the rural community of Ruthven and Kingsville; and

"Whereas Ruthven Public School is vital to the future well-being of the Kingsville and Ruthven communities and its students;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"As parents, teachers, concerned citizens, we hereby object to the closing of the Ruthven Public School, and appeal to the Minister of Education to keep open and maintain the long-term viability of the Ruthven Public School."

I approve and support this petition and will affix my name to it.

PROTECTION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas supported-living residents in southwestern and eastern Ontario were subjected to picketing outside their homes during labour strikes in 2007 and 2009; and

"Whereas residents and neighbours had to endure megaphones, picket lines, portable bathrooms and shining lights at all hours of the day and night on their streets; and

"Whereas individuals with intellectual disabilities and the organizations who support them fought for years to

break down barriers and live in inclusive communities; and

"Whereas Bill 23 passed second reading in the Ontario Legislature on December 6, 2011;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the members of the Legislative Assembly vote in support of Sylvia Jones's Bill 23—the Protecting Vulnerable People Against Picketing Act."

I obviously support this petition, affix my name to it and give it to page Annaleise.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition from my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas recovering from injuries or illnesses at home can enhance recovery, reduce the strain on our health care system and provide comfort to patients;

"Whereas family caregivers need to focus on what matters most—providing care and support to their loved one—without the fear of losing their job;

"Whereas Ontarians who need to care for seriously ill or injured loved ones need job protection;

"Whereas the Family Caregiver Leave Act, if passed, would build on existing family medical leave to provide up to eight weeks of unpaid job leave for employees to provide care and support to a sick or injured family member;

"Whereas the PCs have pledged to vote against the bill, and permanently kill the legislation;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That all parties recognize the importance of health, family, and job security by supporting the Family Caregiver Leave Act to protect the jobs of working Ontarians who need to care for seriously ill or injured loved ones."

I wholly support this petition, affix my signature and send it through page Gopi.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas currently the law takes the onus off of owners that raise violent dogs by making it appear that violence is a matter of genetics; and

"Whereas the Dog Owners' Liability Act does not clearly define a pit bull, nor is it enforced equally across the province, as pit bulls are not an acknowledged breed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly passes Bill 16, Public Safety Related to Dogs Statute Law Amendment Act, 2011, into law."

I couldn't agree more. We need to save the lives of another 1,000 threatened dogs. I'm going to sign this, and

I'm going to give it to fabulous page Angela to be delivered to the table.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease is a degenerative brain disease that causes thinking and memory impairment. Alzheimer's disease is progressive, worsens over time, and will eventually lead to death;

"Whereas there are an estimated 181,000 Ontarians diagnosed with Alzheimer's and related dementia...;

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease creates social, emotional and economic burdens on the family and friends of those suffering with the disease;

"Whereas the total economic burden of dementia in Ontario is expected to increase by more than \$770 million per year through to 2020;

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"We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to establish an Alzheimer's advisory council to advise the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on matters pertaining to strategy respecting research, treatment and the prevention of Alzheimer's and other related dementia."

I support this petition and affix my name to it.

CORNWALL COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

Mr. Jim McDonell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas a petition was delivered to my constituency office with over 2,800 names, asking the Ontario government to review the discriminating hiring practices at the Cornwall Community [Hospital];

"Whereas the hospital is one of the largest employers in our region;

"Whereas our community strongly supports the need to service our population in the official language of their choice;

"Whereas the current policies discriminate against approximately 80% of the general population from obtaining employment or seeking an upgrade to full-time employment at the CCH;

"Whereas the current situation has resulted in significant turmoil in the community;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government of Ontario support the Cornwall Community Hospital board in their effort to work with the community to develop employment policies that meet the linguistic, employment and community needs of the area and which allow the CCH to attract the best-qualified health care professionals available."

PELEE ISLAND FERRY SERVICE

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Mr. Speaker, I have a different petition on a different issue. I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of residents of the Pelee Island and Kingsville area.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is a critical issue going on regarding the ferry service to Pelee Island; and

"Whereas both ferries have been in dry dock undergoing maintenance work, leaving Pelee Island and its residents without transportation service, causing severe and undue hardship; and

"Whereas maintenance to the Jiimaan and the Pelee Islander should be done at the end of the season, not in the beginning; and

"Whereas both boats should not be serviced at the same time; as a result, the farmers on the island are losing the valuable spring planting season, and other businesses are losing business daily; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation should be looking into alternate ferry boats to service Pelee Island. There are several options, which include: the ferry from Kelleys Island, McKeil Marine, Dean Construction and Nadro Marine, which have tugs and barges to transport farming equipment;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Direct the Ministry of Transportation to explore all options in order to implement the heavy-transportation needs of the residents and businesses of Pelee Island. Further, to direct the service providers to put together a plan to prevent further disruption to the ferry services of Pelee Island."

I agree with this petition, will affix my name to it and submit it to the Clerk via Tameem.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Bill 13 is unnecessary as an anti-bullying measure because Ontarians already have Bill 157; and

"Whereas Bill 13 promotes radical revisions to school instruction on sex and gender that a majority of parents do not support; and

"Whereas legislation is not the way to implement equity education (this should rather be addressed by teacher training, after wider parental consultation, in a way which respects the views of people of faith);

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to vote against Bill 13."

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I have a petition entitled "Escaping Domestic Violence."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas all Ontarians have the right to a safe home environment;

"Whereas the government of Ontario works to reduce all barriers in place that prevent victims of domestic violence from fleeing abusive situations;

"Whereas the Residential Tenancies Act does not take into consideration the special circumstances facing a tenant who is suffering from abuse;

"Whereas those that live in fear for their personal safety and that of their children should not be financially penalized for the early termination of their residential leases;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That Bill 22, the Escaping Domestic Violence Act, 2011 be adopted so that victims of domestic violence be afforded a mechanism for the early termination of their lease to allow them to leave an abusive relationship and find a safe place for themselves and their children to call home."

I agree with this petition, affix my signature and send it to the table with page Andrew.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Rod Jackson: I have a petition here from Simcoe County Community Services to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas, since fall 2010, the human rights of students with special needs in Simcoe county schools are

violated by the Simcoe County District School Board decision to tolerate the systematic use of blocker pads to manage these students.

"The systematic use of blocker pads infringes upon the dignity of the students with learning disabilities, the dignity of the education assistants who are using the blocker pads and the dignity of the community members who have to witness this detestable violation of human rights. This practice creates a culture of fear and causes segregation instead of encouraging integration in our community;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Please urge the Minister of Education ... to do the right thing and exercise her ministerial power by issuing a directive to ban the deplorable practice by the Simcoe County District School Board."

I agree with this wholeheartedly and affix my signature and give it to page Katie to bring to the table.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The time for petitions is over. Orders of the day.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Speaker, I'm very pleased to move the adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Attorney General has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carries?

This House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning. Thank you very much.

The House adjourned at 1555.

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DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
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Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
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Publication

No. 59



N° 59

ISSN 1180-2987

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 40th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 40^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 31 May 2012

Jeudi 31 mai 2012



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 31 May 2012

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 31 mai 2012

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE ACT (EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT), 2012

LOI DE 2011 SUR LE CONGÉ FAMILIAL POUR LES AIDANTS NATURELS (MODIFICATION DES NORMES D'EMPLOI)

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 4, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 30, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver leave / Projet de loi 30, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour les aidants naturels.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and good morning to you. It is a beautiful morning out there in the GTA today, unless you're a motorist. From what I understand, there are several transport trucks that have turned over on the 427 and 401. There's a little traffic report for those of you who may be heading out on the road this morning. You might want to check with 680News first before you do that.

It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 30 today. I think we've all—hopefully not all, but many of us have been in the situation where we have had somebody in our family or a close friend or other relative who has been very, very ill and needs someone to stay home and care for them. That's what this bill is intended to do. However, with this bill, as with many of the bills that come from the other side of the House, there are a lot of questions that need to be answered before this can become legislation.

There are many, many people out of work in the province of Ontario right now. There are 550,000 Ontarians who currently don't have a job. Is this bill a priority for those 550,000 Ontarian men and women? As we heard yesterday in question period, 16.5% of young people under the age of 25 are unemployed in this province right now. This is not the kind of bill that's doing anything to create jobs in the province of Ontario. What it does is, actually, it makes it more difficult for those who are

creating jobs in this economy right now, an economy that's struggling, an economy that's at the bottom of the heap in Canada right now.

What this actually does is, just for a little bit of background, it would give a family member up to eight weeks off the job, but there's no plan to pay for that person to be off the job. Everything coming from the government side is indicating that they're expecting the federal government to pay for this. So it's a Dalton McGuinty Liberal government promise here in Ontario, but they're expecting the feds to pay for it. It's kind of an interesting bill to put forward.

The thing to remember in the province of Ontario is that there is only one taxpayer, right? There's only one taxpayer here. This bill falls unbelievably short of the cost of this program to the economy or to any level of government.

So how many people can afford to be off work for eight weeks? We all met this week with members from the Multiple Sclerosis Society in our offices, and they had a reception here. We were all wearing the nice carnations on our suit jackets and outfits earlier this week in the House to recognize people that are struggling with MS. Many of us have met with members of the Cancer Society and have heard the stories. One of the problems that the people in particular with the MS Society had with the bill—I had a brief chat with them in my office, up on the third floor here, earlier this week—was that under this bill, if you decided that you were going to take one day off to look after your ill relative, or even part of an afternoon, maybe, to help that relative get to a doctor's appointment or an X-ray or go pick up some prescriptions or go buy them some groceries or give them some care that they need, you were burning the whole week.

Mr. Frank Klees: On a point of order, Speaker, I wonder if you could check for a quorum?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): A quorum is present.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): A quorum is present. Member from Prince Edward—Hastings, continue.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you. It's nice to see that everybody decided to show up. They must have seen me on TV in their offices and rushed down here. I know the member from Peterborough likes to be here when I'm speaking. He likes to participate quite often when I'm speaking—

Mr. Jeff Leal: I sent an SOS to round everybody up.

Mr. Todd Smith: I was worried that you might have missed my traffic report that I had on about five minutes

ago about all the overturned transport trucks on the 400 series of highway in the GTA this morning.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I sent an email to say I'm on my way.

Mr. Todd Smith: It's nice to see you.

That is another issue, too. We've got all these traffic accidents out there. We've got all this gridlock out there on the 400 series of highways. People can't get to work, and it's a struggling economy. The member from Barrie is here. He made it in.

Back to the matter at hand, which is Bill 30. Many people who are caring for a loved one with a chronic disease need to make the maximum use of the days they take off. Where I was before we had to check for a quorum was that we were talking about whether or not it was the right thing to do to basically eliminate a whole week of this Caregiver Leave Act for taking just a few hours off in one day, and that's the way it's written. The MS Society had some concerns about that this week.

A lot of people can't afford to take off a whole week of work, and a lot of people don't necessarily need to take off a whole week of work to look after a loved one. So that's something that obviously needs to be adjusted if this does, in fact, get to committee and we do clause-by-clause on this bill to discuss the merits of it. So I guess there are questions about that. This legislation doesn't give family members the option of just taking half a day off or a day off without charging them for the whole week. I believe this is something we could possibly fix when we do get to committee.

You know, it's interesting that this bill comes out and you're almost asking people to adjust their lives to the bill, when the bill should really be there to allow people to run their own lives. It's just another example of how poorly thought out this legislation is. It's all about just gathering headlines, which is what this government is often all about. They run out of ideas and they scramble to put something out there that will get them a headline instead of putting out something that's thoughtful and comprehensive and actually is good policy. We don't see a lot of good policy from this government; we see a lot of good politics, unfortunately.

In addition to something being good politics, it also has got to make sense and be a good law. I guess we can accomplish that if we get to clause-by-clause. If you don't do that, if you don't build a bill on good policy, quite often what you'll end up doing is having to backtrack and close down two power plants in Mississauga and Oakville to save seats on your side because your policy is flawed. Unfortunately, that's what we've seen.

There are also many questions about what this bill does for small businesses—and I am the small business critic on this side.

Mr. Rob Leone: And a great one.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much.

Earlier this month, I believe it was our member from Elgin-Middlesex-London, Mr. Yurek, who has a pharmacy in his riding and was talking about the effect of this kind of bill on his business. It really struck me, as the small business critic, how this family caregiver bill could actually create huge problems for small businesses.

He told a story about a few years ago, when his pharmacy only had 12 employees—if this was in place at the time, he could have lost one of his pharmacists for up to eight weeks. In a rural area, that's a huge, huge loss. He told a story about the fact that he did have an employee, a pharmacist, go off on leave for a period of time. When you only have 12 employees, and you have a skilled employee like a pharmacist, which don't grow on trees in rural Ontario—there are lots of them here in the Toronto area—

Interjection: Mr. Yurek.

9910

Mr. Todd Smith: That's who we are talking about here: Mr. Yurek. He and his brother had to work 18-hour days just to keep the pharmacy going. That's the kind of thing that this bill would create, the dilemma that it would create for small businesses. So I think it's something that really needs to be looked at. He talked about the fact that for any small business, and this would affect small businesses under 50 people, they just don't have the manpower, especially when it comes to some of these skilled trades, to make up for the time.

I understand the sensitivity of this bill and why it was brought forward: for companionate reasons. Unfortunately, many of us, as I said earlier, have had to look after an ailing and failing family member. I recall when we had to look after my grandmother, my mother, fortunately, was a nurse, so she was a professional caregiver and was able to give the proper care at home. This is something that is intended to provide some compassionate leave for family members, but unfortunately this bill is rather flimsy. It needs to have some changes in it that will allow people a little bit more liberty to take the time that they need.

There's no disputing the motives of this bill. We would all like to care for our chronic and terminally ill family members; there's no question about that. Anyone who has ever been in that circumstance knows exactly what those final days and hours are worth. Once they're over, your life changes forever in ways that would never have seemed possible before.

I look forward to potentially discussing this bill further at committee. Thank you for the opportunity this morning to speak on it, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I too was visited by a member of the MS Society this week. It is always a pleasure to welcome them to Queen's Park and support the great work that the MS Society is doing.

I like the comments that were made by the previous speaker, who really spoke to the issue of: Do we need to do more for family caregivers? Absolutely, we do. But then comes, "What are we doing with this bill?" With this bill, we are giving caregivers the opportunity to take a week off at a time in very, very specific circumstances that are very limiting.

When you look at who is doing most of that work, most of that work is done by people looking after aging parents, people looking after some of our family mem-

bers or friends or relatives in the communities who are aging. Well, Mr. Speaker, aging is not a disease. Aging would never qualify for what we have in this legislation.

The spirit of the legislation is good. I had the pleasure to hear the Minister of Labour, who was there and attended the MS Society lunch, talk about what she wants the bill to accomplish. I think we can do a whole lot more while respecting the limited fiscal constraints that Ontario is under, but bring more flexibility to the bill so that not only do we give permission to take a week at a time but we have to build more flexibility as to how family caregivers can be excused from work.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'm glad to be offering a few short comments on what I have been hearing this morning. I just wanted to thank the member from Prince Edward-Hastings for his comments. He spoke of the need for the bill, and I think that everybody who stands in this House to talk to this bill has a personal story or reflection where they've understood the need, the gap in legislation that would allow for something as flexible as this piece of legislation.

But I also hear, I think, that both the opposition sides don't appear to know about the personal emergency leave, which is a piece of legislation that provides an unpaid job-protected leave up to 10 days per calendar year. Employees can take that for personal illness, an injury, a medical emergency, a death or an urgent matter.

At the end of the day, there are a number of leaves that are available, but what we're talking about in the family caregiver leave is to fill that gap. We've identified a gap, and so have many of our groups that we spoke of this morning. We talked about the MS Society having come here the other day. They're one of the groups that have indicated an expressed support for the bill. They recognize that there is a gap in legislation, and they appreciate the fact that we put this legislation forward. The Parkinson Society is another group. The Alzheimer Society of Ontario, the Canadian Cancer Society and the caregiver coalition: These are groups that have physical experience, everyday experience, and I trust their advice to be heartfelt. Obviously, they have day-to-day experience that would lend their support having great value to us, so I appreciate that advice.

I appreciate that there are members in this House who offer constructive suggestions on how to make the bill better. I look forward to their advice during committee hearings, and thank them for their constructive advice.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm very pleased to respond to the member from Prince Edward-Hastings. I believe what he said is quite an accurate interpretation. All members would, from the very premise of the bill, want to support the idea of families being able to take care of their loved ones. That's an unquestionable sentiment from our leader, Tim Hudak.

However, when you get down to it, it's sort of like much is said about nothing. That's kind of the truth. There

isn't one nickel of support for that individual who has to take time off work, so that's a problem. But they are forcing Stephen Harper to pick up the ball. It is so transparent. It's so upsetting to me that it's always, "Blame someone else."

Here's the other issue. Let's say, for instance, I was the caregiver—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, some of them are interrupting.

Say I was the caregiver and I have to take a day off work from a law firm or something like that, to take my ill child or mother to the hospital or for an appointment. I couldn't just take the day off; I have to take the week. It's seven days at a time. I mean, what for? Maybe I'm only needed there some of the time. Maybe there are other members of the family who want to take part of that time. They should have really given some thought to this.

I commend the Minister of Labour, who is here, and she's responding to things, which is good. But I'll just read it here. It says, "Family medical leave is unpaid, job-protected leave of up to eight weeks" for the employee to provide care or support to an individual who "has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death." I would have to say, the regulation, "a significant risk of death"—now, if it's deemed that it's not—look, the devil's in the detail. I did speak on this earlier, and I'd refer the listeners to look to Hansard and see my full comments on it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to join the debate today. I am anxious to see this bill head towards committee, because there are some mechanics within the constructs of the bill that need to be worked out, a whole host of different scenarios that could come into play, one being, what happens if a family member is out of province and that caregiver is in a different province and needs to provide the care outside of Ontario? How do we deal with that scenario?

Also, simply the fact that—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I can't hear anything, Mr. Speaker. It's early and we're already doing this? This doesn't bode well for the rest of the day.

We all have a personal story. My brother was injured in a mountain bike accident. He's a quadriplegic; he requires ongoing care. They have a different system in British Columbia. He does receive a great amount of care. The thing is that those caregivers are paid well, and he receives a wonderful service through his community and through the province there.

But this leaves a tremendous gap for those family members who need to take advantage of this type of a program yet would never—could never—financially carry the burden of losing one, two, three days' worth of work. That's putting people further behind than I think the members in this House understand.

0920

You know, we've heard that some members of the official opposition would like the federal government to not play a role, or to play a role, or do you want money attached through the federal government? I don't know. I know the government would like the federal government to take a role in terms of attaching some supplements through EI. Why don't you just do it here? You have the ability to attach a supplement to this program to ensure that people take advantage of it, that you get a good catchment of this program, yet it's a Band-Aid solution. It's a stopgap, and it's such a small measure that we see this in almost every respect when the government is trying to address problems. You can do it right, but the direction that the government is heading is not that direction.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you, Speaker, very much. It was interesting to hear the comments from the member from Nickel Belt, the Minister of Labour, our good friend here from Durham and our member from Essex as well, who, from what I could hear—and it wasn't much—seemed to ask a lot of questions as well. That's the nature of this bill, right? There are not a lot of answers in this bill; it's all about questions. We heard questions from the member from Durham. We heard more questions from the members from Nickel Belt and Essex as well.

One of the things that the member from Durham touched on is, what is a serious illness or a serious health condition? That's one of the questions I have as well. It's not clearly defined. There is no clear definition of who is eligible to take this caregiver leave.

One of the other things, from a small business point of view—again, I don't know how much thought the government put into how this was going to affect businesses, both big and small. The Minister of Labour touched on the emergency personal leave, that will have a negative effect on large manufacturers as well. But it's going to have, as I detailed earlier, an effect on small businesses.

One of the things that the PC Party wanted to bring in was a small business bill of rights. The main point of that small business bill of rights was to consult with business before any new legislation or regulation is tabled here in the House so that we could understand what kind of an impact it was going to have on job creation, which is arguably the biggest issue facing the province right now. We have 550,000 people out of work in the province of Ontario, and we want to give people eight weeks off? It's going to have a negative impact on business. I think there are a lot of questions that need to be answered when this bill gets to committee. Thank you again, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rod Jackson: It's a great pleasure to rise today to speak on behalf of the PC caucus on Bill 30, the Family Caregiver Leave Act. It's actually one that's quite interesting for me, given the fact that I've spent probably about the last 20 years of my life as a human resources

professional and worked in labour relations. So this is something I know a little bit about. I've actually lived the experience of employers and seen what it means to employees to have an employer that actually cares about what they're doing and actually has a conscience about how they manage their employees—which, I might add, is most of the employers in Ontario. Because, let's remember, the biggest employer in Ontario is small business. I'll tell you what: Especially in Barrie, the biggest employer is small business. Over 70% of all the people who work in Barrie are employed by employers who have four or less employees.

Let's talk about what that means to employers when they have to give eight weeks of leave to an employee—who is not getting paid for this leave either, by the way. I'll talk about that in a minute. Let's talk a little bit about how this is really just window dressing. It's just putting a bright, shiny piece onto a bill to try to score some points. Even before we go into the details of the bill, there are suggestions from my PC colleagues, and perhaps members of the third party as well: If you're planning to open a boutique shop or a small business, ask our colleagues across the aisle for window dressing tips, because they're the experts. We see this all the time.

The second thought: Don't do it, unless you want debt, deficit and a credit downgrade. Most certainly, they'll tell you it's not their fault. As the member from Durham mentioned earlier, it's always somebody else's fault, isn't it?

In all seriousness, Bill 13 is political window dressing at its finest. It touches our deepest feelings and our passion for our families and our loved ones, but it does really little to help our loved ones or our small businesses, who are struggling right now, not only to keep their doors open but to keep these very people that this bill pretends to protect employed. It provides eight weeks; this bill provides eight weeks of leave for people who need to take care of their family members who are seriously ill. It sounds great, right?

But there's a catch. As the member from Durham and the member from Prince Edward-Hastings mentioned, you don't get paid for it—small catch.

The best part is that the government is expecting the federal government to provide EI coverage for people on this leave. As my colleague the member from Cambridge pointed out a few weeks ago, the government knows full well what the answer will be. It will be no.

Interjection.

Mr. Rod Jackson: They at least know that they can't afford it. At least they've got enough sense to realize what they can and can't afford.

As a result of eight long years of Liberal mismanagement, our once-great province is now taking welfare cheques from that very government. They're already giving us enough money; they're not about to hand out more. Now the Premier and the government is actually asking for more money.

What is even more mind-blowing is that he hasn't even asked yet—hasn't even asked the federal government yet. So we're just assuming it's going to happen.

So let's face it: The average hard-working Ontarian can't afford to take this leave, especially people who are already incurring large costs, often large costs, for the very family members that they have to take the leave to give care to.

Let's talk about some of the increases that businesses are already incurring and families are incurring with the increases to hydro through the global adjustment. The Auditor General stated that the Premier's green energy experiment alone explains 56% of the increases to people's hydro bills. I don't know about you, but walking around and knocking on 30,000 to 40,000 doors like I did in the past year, that was something that people were talking about. It's hurting them hard, all the time—especially small businesses.

I have a good friend who has a butcher shop; he can barely keep the doors open. He actually went and employed seven people from another butcher shop in Barrie that got shut down purely because of the hydro costs. He can't shut down his freezers in the middle of the day. He can't choose when he turns on and off his power. He can't make that decision. He doesn't have a choice. He has got to keep his meat cold. Yet he still took seven extra employees from that butcher shop when it got shut down and employed them in his place, and he makes nothing from that. That's an employer who cares about his employees and has a good sense of conscience that can be appealed to.

That's what we need to be talking to employers about. We have to be consulting with them about these sorts of things; that's the main point. There is no consultation.

There is no demonstrable need for this. The best practice is for an employer and an employee to negotiate a proposition: "Let's talk." You can't legislate everything. It's just one thing after another, whether you're legislating about what kind of food they can eat in their cafeterias, whether you can talk about how many days—the minister already mentioned they get a 10-day emergency leave.

I tell you, as an HR professional, most people never use it. Part of the reason they never use it is because they don't know it exists in the first place. Most employers don't know it exists, and if they do know it exists, they don't know how to administer it. If they do know how to administer it, they know that the employer has to get a note from the employee saying that they have reasonable cause to believe that they're ill. There are a number of different things that the doctor has to go through to prove that they're actually eligible for the emergency leave. They don't know that. It's either getting abused or it's not getting used. That's what is going to happen to this: It's going to get abused or it's not going to get used. It's not going to benefit anybody. It's just window dressing.

Nobody is trying to deny leave for loved ones. No one wants to deny care for loved ones.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Yes, you are. That's exactly what you're doing.

Mr. Rod Jackson: The government can imply that we don't love our loved ones and we don't want to care for

them and paint this picture that we're awful. But, you know what? The reality of the situation, the pragmatics of it are that we can't afford it, people won't know about it, they won't know how to administer it and the cost is going to be immense for businesses that are already struggling.

My colleague from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington pointed out that during the minister's briefing the minister's own staff provided no data that there is demonstrable need for this bill. There's no reason for the government to table this bill other than to score some political points by playing on people's emotions. We see that a lot from the other side.

0930

Bill 30 is poorly thought out. For one, it doesn't provide a guideline as to what constitutes a serious medical condition. If the government leaves such an important definition free for interpretation, it's highly likely that this intended bill will turn into a dysfunctional disaster, and I will attest to that, having worked for 20 years in the human resources field. This will not work.

For example, a small business owner may be forced to give leave to an employee who should not be qualified for the leave. I've seen that happen so many times, and usually it's because an employer doesn't know the rules around the whole leave.

Especially when we're talking about small employers that employ five or less employees—we just keep piling the regulations on these people so it makes it harder and harder to do business. Anyone who has talked to a small business owner for more than five minutes will tell you that they know there's a burden that makes it so difficult for them to do business that they don't want to do business anymore; they want to get out of it and go work for somebody else. We're losing the biggest employers in our province because we're regulating their businesses to death. It's not fair.

If one of these people go on leave, how does the government expect a small business to carry out its daily operations? They can't. If someone goes for eight weeks, and a small business loses one quarter of its employee workforce, they've got to hire someone else. How do they do that? There are already regulations that make it so difficult to hire someone part-time or for a short time. Imagine trying to find someone who has got a specific skill set to fill that gap for that short period of time. You're going to kill that business in many cases; they're not going to be able to do it.

I go back to the butcher. Try to find a qualified butcher who can actually afford to let one of his people go for up to eight weeks. You can't do it. It doesn't make any sense.

Let's be real about what's happening here. This will not help employers. It won't help employees, certainly ones who need a paycheque, because you're taking more and more and more out of their pockets every single day. They can't afford to have more.

Conversely, an employee who should be qualified for leave isn't given one because the doctor doesn't think there's a serious medical condition.

Good laws should have clear definitions so that we know what they're talking about; this one doesn't. It falls woefully short of the simple and commonsensical expectation.

Furthermore, Bill 30 is unnecessarily rigid in many ways. The bill dictates that an employee may take leave only in periods of entire weeks—a week being a period of seven days starting and ending on Saturday. As a result, this is an unreasonable clause. A caregiver has to either take extra unpaid days off—delaying care and delivery to the following Monday. There's no clear rationale behind this unnecessary and unreasonable restriction. This doesn't make sense.

The bill needs lots more thought. I agree with my colleague from Essex: If this does go to committee, it needs some severe changes to make it work.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It's funny how sometimes we disagree as to where we're coming from philosophically, but at the end of the day I tend to agree with what he said: that the bill, as it is written, won't be that useful.

If we look at the definition which is not there, the bill only applies to serious medical conditions. "Serious medical condition," unfortunately, has not been defined in the bill, but it is terminology that has been commonly used by insurance companies. People who have insurance to cover themselves if they get sick have used this terminology of "serious medical condition." The definition already exists elsewhere in the health care system, but it has not been defined in the law.

My guess is that once a health provider, a family physician or a nurse practitioner finds herself in front of a client where it's requested of them that they sign a caregiver leave and they know that the regulation to sign one of those is a serious medical condition, they will be really, really hesitant to sign one of those for the 91-year-old who doesn't hear very good anymore and doesn't see very good anymore and has trouble walking, because he needs a walker. He would certainly benefit from having his caregiver come to a specialist appointment with him because going there by himself may be difficult—sometimes the parking, the transportation. Once he's there, he doesn't always understand what the physician is trying to say. He would very much benefit from having his caregiver come to that appointment with him, but he would not qualify for a serious medical condition. So I agree that the bill is very limited in its usefulness right now.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I just want to follow up on one issue the member for Barrie raised, which—I've always found this very disconcerting about the Conservative Party, Mr. Speaker. They love to beat up on Ontario. Western Conservatives, whom I used to run against in Manitoba, love to tell everyone that Ontario is the problem. Then, our own members love to tell us that we're the problem as well. That's why I'm proud to be a Liberal.

Some \$23 billion goes out of this province. When I was mayor of Winnipeg, if it wasn't for Ontario, they wouldn't have a floodway and a human rights museum, because Ontario taxpayers are paying for that. Ontario taxpayers pay for higher subsidies in Quebec for settlement money and in western Canada, including housing programs. When are you going to stand up for this province? Some \$23 billion. Quite frankly, this is just absurd to me.

Employment insurance covers leave. Why wouldn't it? If you actually, as you so often do on issues like Bill 13 and others, believe in this stuff, vote for it. We have a right to employment insurance like everybody else. We have the lowest level of per capita spending of any provincial government, and we subsidize, with the exception of Alberta and Saskatchewan, public services so they can have lower taxes and have more services. And if you compare us to Quebec, they've got a good deal. Ontarians deserve the same deal from Confederation that Quebecers and Manitobans do. I'm proud to be a Canadian and I'm proud to have lived in three provinces. If you lived in Manitoba or you lived in Quebec for significant parts of your life, you'd know that we don't get the deal other provinces do. This economy, for most of our lifetime, and today, and for most of the next decade, will continue to pay the freight.

I owned and operated a business in this province, Mr. Speaker. We paid low taxes. Taxes on small business are 18% less than they were when you were in power. It is easier to do business in Ontario than it ever has been, and I paid less taxes under a Liberal government, as a corporation and as a small business, than I did under a Tory, so if this is unacceptable to you, maybe you can apologize for your taxation record in government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I've never been so proud to be a PC, and I'm going to stand here right now and tell you something. I was on the committee for Bill 13, and I want to tell you something: I was never so ashamed to be on that. First and foremost, we had five days of deliberation with 90 people who came in. If all I have is my word, I owed it to them to have a voice in what was said in that. We took one of the 17 amendments that we had, and I was embarrassed that, out of all the things that were said, we didn't come together, first and foremost.

Second of all, we stand here, and I am a conduit and a vessel to my constituents of Burlington—and we all are. This is our job: to educate the people on what is going on in this Legislature so they can go back and they understand. The best part about this is that we are all people from different places, and we all deserve to be here to give the people the information that they need from different eyes, because we're all unique people.

But I want to explain something else. When we stand here today, this is another example of what comes from the government when it's their agenda and not what is everybody else's agenda. They need to listen to what people are saying, because we're not listening. I can't be

the only person in here with our PC caucus who is knocking on doors and listening to people, and they're dumbfounded at what exactly goes on in this House. We are a minority government that all needs to work together, and it amazes me that we do not because it still acts like a majority government over there.

So I'm standing here to say today that I am proud, never prouder, that I am a PC. I will stand here to say that if we ever needed a change, we need it now, and we need to be standing here for the constituents who we all represent, as conduits and vessels, to continue to be the voice for them.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

M. Michael Mantha: Ça me fait plaisir de tout le temps me lever ici dans la Chambre pour adresser ce qui concerne les Ontariens, spécifiquement pour cette pièce. Et puis, il faut qu'on ait de la discussion. C'est une bonne étape de présenter ce projet de loi par en avant. Je parlerai à mon collègue du Parti conservateur où il indique qu'il y a un attachement, il y a un problème, il y a un obstacle pour les personnes qui trouvent la période de demande—qu'il faut que tu prennes une pleine semaine. Franchement, moi je regarderais ça de l'autre bord. C'est que l'employeur peut maintenant avoir la discussion avec son employé qui dit : « Oui, je prends la pleine semaine. » Maintenant, l'employeur peut se mettre dans une position où, vraiment, il peut regarder toute la pleine période que la personne va être partie de l'ouvrage.

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I hear what my colleague from the Progressive Conservatives had said: that when you're looking at the entire week's period that an individual has to take in regard to this bill—he refers to it as being stringent and being an obstacle for an employer. I look at it another way: that maybe that is of a great benefit to the employer where there will be a set time set aside for an individual to take that period.

But we have to remember also that in these small businesses that are going to be affected—and large businesses as well—you know who your workforce is. You have that ability and you have that flexibility to work with them. When somebody is actually affected by a loved one who is in need of care, not only is the employee being affected, but the employer is also being affected because they are aware of the situation.

You're right: Small businesses are the backbone of many Ontario communities and rural Ontario communities. We do need to have the discussions in order to identify what exactly are the steps that need to be taken by employers and employees so we can make this a benefit.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Barrie, you have two minutes.

Mr. Rod Jackson: I've heard a couple of times from the opposite side that somehow or another they're trying to get people to believe that we over here don't stand up for the people of Ontario, and we're not proud of On-

tario. You know what? Nobody believes that. We didn't work as hard as we did to get here and get these seats because we don't care about our communities and we don't care about Ontario.

It's not Ontario that's the problem; not at all. It's the government of Ontario that's the problem. That's why we need it to change, and we need it to be responsible to the people who elected it.

We also need to remember that we need to help support people who don't have jobs. There are hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people who don't have jobs. In Barrie, we have one of the highest unemployment rates in the country for a city of its size. We bounce off the bottom with Windsor now. When I tell people that, they're surprised. They can't believe it. "What's wrong in Barrie?" What's wrong is that businesses are being regulated so badly it is being made so difficult to do business in Ontario.

I've been a small business owner in Canada, in Ontario, as well. I have lived in other provinces; I lived in other countries for a number of years. I'm proud to be in Ontario. I'm proud to have established a business in Ontario. I'm proud to have worked for employers in Ontario. I'm proud to have been an employee in Ontario, too.

This bill doesn't do anything substantially or tangibly to help the employers or the employees in Ontario—full stop. It is pure window dressing from the government side to build on people's emotions and really does absolutely nothing to help the people who really need the help. It makes tons of assumptions about how it's going to get paid for without actually giving any substantial study or thought to stakeholders.

If I talk to employers in Barrie, large and small, about this—in fact, I have received lots of correspondence from them. They don't want it. They're saying the same thing I am: less regulation and more paying attention to the real employers in the province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I am very pleased this morning to have this opportunity to participate in the second reading debate of Bill 30, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver leave. The short title of this bill, as the government has articulated it, is the Family Caregiver Leave Act (Employment Standards Amendment), 2011.

Mr. Speaker, this bill was first introduced in this House on December 8. So it was almost six months ago. It has been called for debate from time to time when the government is uncertain or unsure of what to do to fill this Legislature's time. It would appear to be sort of a place-keeping bill that the government calls from time to time just to kind of fill in time and fill in airtime.

Our caucus has spoken to this bill extensively. This morning, we had participation from the members from Prince Edward-Hastings and Barrie, both of whom come from constituencies that have many concerns about many other issues that are facing the province, obviously, as

well as this one. We have a jobs crisis in the province of Ontario. We have huge issues with respect to energy—and, of course, wind energy is a big issue in many ridings in the province of Ontario.

We have the equine industry. Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity on Tuesday night to attend a big public meeting in Wellington county that was organized by the warden of Wellington county, Chris White, and the county council. There were hundreds of people there who were very, very concerned about the potential devastation of the equine industry because of the government's decision to end the slots-at-racetracks program. Randy Pettapiece, my colleague from Perth—Wellington, was also there. At the end of the meeting we had the chance to address the crowd, to speak to them about what we're going to do. I indicated a willingness to continue to work on their behalf, to advocate their concerns.

Clearly, the government is not listening, but we would urge particularly the members of cabinet, who have an opportunity to speak in the inner sanctum, behind closed doors in the cabinet meetings, to seriously re-evaluate this issue, because I believe it's going to cost taxpayers more than what it will save, if anything. I think in fact it's going to be shown to be one of the big boondoggles of the provincial government at the appropriate time when we see the books after the next government takes office.

I do digress, Mr. Speaker, and I must return to the discussion on Bill 30, and I recognize that. This bill, if we were to listen to the government and believe them, would purport to create a family caregiver leave, added to the Employment Standards Act. "Under section 49.3, an employee is entitled to a leave of absence without pay to provide care or support to a family member who has a serious medical condition. An employee may take up to eight weeks per calendar year with respect to each family member described in the section or prescribed by regulation. Entitlement to family caregiver leave is in addition to any entitlement to family medical leave under section 49.1 and personal emergency leave under section 50."

Our caucus, again—as I said, we've discussed this bill now for 11 hours. It's interesting that the government seems to think this is an important priority, yet six months into it we still haven't concluded the debate. We're down to 10-minute speeches, but at the same time, 11 hours of debate—the government hasn't called it on a consistent basis; just from time to time when it doesn't know what else to call.

Obviously, if this place is to be relevant, we need to be responding to the day-to-day concerns of the people of Ontario. Again, there are all kinds of concerns that are brought to my attention in my constituency office on Fridays. My staff work on them through the week and I get back when I can, obviously, to participate in those discussions with my constituents. I have to say that this doesn't come up very often in my riding office.

From time to time I've heard concerns about this, and I think that most compassionate employers who want to retain staff over time would take a compassionate approach. If staff need time off to deal with urgent family

matters, I think that most employers are probably already doing this sort of thing. But the government seems to feel that it's necessary to make some sort of value statement that it's doing something to ensure that this happens in every case, and I understand that.

I also recognize some of the points that were made by the members for Prince Edward—Hastings and Barrie on the concerns that small businesses have. Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business will tell you that coming out of a recession—we're still in economic difficulty, obviously, with the jobs situation, but coming out of a recession, it's the small business sector that is the most dynamic in terms of job creation, and up to 80% of new jobs tend to be in the small business sector. Surely, that being the case, we want to encourage small business, we want to get behind small business, we want to evaluate the level of regulation, red tape and the level of tax that small business is facing.

That has always been the focus of our caucus, and we've brought forward those concerns for years. Obviously, when we were in government between 1995 and 2003, it was a big focus of ours. Small business contributed to the creation of more than a million jobs in the province of Ontario, encouraged and supported by the Harris and Eves governments.

Under the McGuinty government, I hear consistently from business people that the provincial government is in no way supportive of small business. In fact, the level of regulation, red tape, and the level of tax has never been worse. I even hear comments that it's worse under the McGuinty Liberals than it was under the Bob Rae government, the New Democrats, between 1990 and 1995. At that time, certainly when I was here, we considered the level of tax, red tape and regulation to be killing jobs and small business, and oppressive.

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I think the government needs to obviously listen to the opposition in this regard. We have all kinds of ideas to bring forward, and certainly in a minority Parliament, I would venture to suggest, we have an obligation to bring forward constructive suggestions and ideas. It's not good enough just to be obstructionist and present the opposition. Although we do have an obligation to do that too, I would say we also have a commensurate obligation to bring forward constructive, good ideas from our side of the House. We've tried to do that.

Unfortunately, the McGuinty government has been more or less unwilling to co-operate with us. Of course, they point the finger at us in terms of our perceived unwillingness to work with them, but I would suggest that the latter is actually—we are prepared to work with them. We're certainly making an effort. We're trying to bring forward ideas. We have a considerable number of ideas with respect to elimination of red tape and regulation. Of course, this government is looking to solve the fiscal problem that they face, that they created, largely, with higher taxes and higher regulation on small business. Again, we would encourage the government to consider some of these ideas.

Certainly, our position on this bill has been brought forward, as I said, by a number of our colleagues. We have pointed out the fact that the minister's staff provided an initial briefing on the legislation to our caucus and gave us this information. We were told that this bill is intended to introduce a proposed family caregiver's leave for up to eight unpaid weeks per year. To qualify for the leave, the employee must be caring for an individual whom a physician has deemed to have a critical injury or illness and cannot care for themselves. We are told the leave will mirror the family medical leave significantly, except it will not include the provision of significant risk of death within a 26-week period.

Currently, before this bill was introduced, we were told that there are only two leaves available to workers in Ontario that are protected under the Employment Standards Act. Family medical leave is unpaid, job-protected leave of up to eight weeks in a 26-week period, but for an employee to be eligible, a qualified health practitioner must issue a certificate stating that the individual to be cared for has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death occurring within a period of 26 weeks.

Under the federal Employment Insurance Act, six weeks of employment insurance benefits may be paid to EI-eligible employees under this leave. That, of course, has been discussed in the context of this debate: whether or not the federal government has been adequately consulted in this regard; offloading the responsibility for this provincial legislation onto the federal government, expecting them to pay for it. Certainly, we would have to call attention to that and question whether or not that's appropriate.

Personal emergency leave: Some employees have the right to take up to 10 days of unpaid, job-protected leave each calendar year, due to illness, injury and certain other emergencies and urgent matters. This leave is only eligible for individuals who work for a company that regularly employs more than 50 employees.

Again, we have concerns about this bill. During the initial briefing, the Ministry of Labour staff could not cite any demand for this proposed leave, nor could they cite any circumstances or instances where employees had asked for leave to care for a family member and were terminated as a result. The Ministry of Labour also has not yet briefed any stakeholder groups whom this bill could significantly affect.

In short, our caucus has concerns. We're not sure that this bill is the right way to go. We do encourage the government to send this bill to committee so that we can have an opportunity to hear from many of the interested groups and individuals. I think that's appropriate and prudent, and I hope that can happen soon.

I know that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has a real interest in this and, I'm sure, would want to participate in those discussions. They are the voice of small business. I think that to the extent that we, as a minority Legislature, can work with small business and work with the people who speak on their behalf through the CFIB, obviously we're going to be acting in the public interest.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your indulgence this morning in listening to my comments, and I encourage all members of this House to consider the comments of the official opposition with respect to Bill 30.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was interesting to listen to the comments that were made by the previous member on a number of issues. The first one is that you have to realize that this bill will only be needed when your employer doesn't co-operate. Right now in Ontario, people who find themselves looking after their loved ones—most of the time, their employers know. Most of the time, their employers are sympathetic and have already put into place as much flexibility as they can.

I mean, let's face it: Whether you are an employer or an employee, everybody has a heart. If you know that you're looking after a dying mother or you're looking after a very disabled person and you're also holding down a job, your employer will know about this. You will have had to have chats with your employer about requesting flexibility etc. This bill will only apply when you have gone to your employer and explained to them that you are the primary caregiver for somebody, usually for years and years, and then your employer does not comply; your employer does not give you the flexibility that you need.

When you look at those people—I remember the Parkinson Society coming to talk to me about this bill and saying, "When our members need to go for cataract surgery, for example, you need to put little drops in your eyes. You need to do this four times a day. So the caregiver would like to sneak back at home four times a day to put the drops in, but the bill does not allow you to do this." The bill says, "You should take a whole week." Everybody loses. The worker doesn't want a full week, the employer doesn't want a full week, but that's all we have to offer. We have to do better.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I just wanted to thank the member from Wellington-Halton Hills for his comments. I think he started out with his comments kind of in a way that was not helpful and that he talked about more pressing issues, and I can't think of anything more pressing when somebody has somebody ill at home.

I guess I heard from the PC caucus a number of comments with regard to the fact that we hadn't consulted and that we hadn't been talking to small business. I just want to remind people—I raised this before when I spoke about the bill—the Human Resources Professionals Association did a survey back in January and they got 616 responses. These respondents worked almost exclusively for large companies which were able to implement these internal policies. Some 95.6% of those 616 responses supported the idea of family caregiver leave. That's a very high incidence.

A majority of those respondents noted that the issue is timely and urgent. They said it had an impact on many Canadians across Canada. The respondents also noted that it was a complicated issue. I think everybody here

has acknowledged that. They said it was difficult to legislate and difficult to administer. I think that's what we've heard this morning. But they also gave the government support and credit for addressing it. They noted that the legislation was progressive and that it was a step in the right direction for Ontario. Many commented that through the sheer force of demographics, their companies have already been forced to address this issue. So you can put your head in the sand, or you can decide to address the issue. That's what this legislation is trying to do.

I guess I would close; I have about 20 seconds left. One of the comments in the response was, "This is an excellent retention initiative. It is costly to recruit, select and train new employees. It is better to allow for family care leave than to go through the process of hiring a new employee. Although small companies may find it difficult to deal with an extended absence, they manage to do so for apprenticeship training and other extended absences."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I very much appreciate the opportunity to comment regarding the member from Wellington-Halton Hills.

I have to tell you, if you look at individual cases, it's something that needs to be addressed. Very specifically, it states in subsection (2), "An employee is entitled to a leave of absence without pay to provide care or support to an individual described in subsection (4) if a qualified health practitioner issues a certificate stating that the individual has a serious medical condition."

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, the concern here is the seven-day provision in regard to that. I'll give you an example. My aunt, Chacha Mary, as she's known, had a knee replacement where she had an epidural that paralyzed her. My mother is the one who is now driving to Toronto to pick her up because of the problems that are taking place with Wheel-Trans. Wheel-Trans would send an individual—they end up sending cabs, and she cannot walk or get into a cab, so my mother ends up driving from Oshawa to Toronto in order to pick her up to get in for some care to try and assist her. We're going through a very difficult time in this particular case. A seven-day provision in order to assist an individual is not something that's going to be functional in this particular case.

What we want to see is the ability to assist these individuals in matters that's going to be functional. In order to take a seven-day leave for an individual in similar situations would be very problematic for a lot of people, where more specific opportunities to target those individuals who are in the care and need that specific assistance, where possible, would be very beneficial to a lot. I think that a lot of provisions that need to be addressed—such as this—through the committee process and other aspects would be far more beneficial to the individuals in doing what the government wants to assist with.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a pleasure to rise and address the comments made by the member from Wellington-Halton Hills.

The idea of giving leave for people who have to look after parents or relatives who are ill is not, in itself, a bad idea. What concerns us is that the bill is very narrow. The bill is put forward in a context where there is not adequate home care, not adequate support for caregivers in this province. Like many of the bills that we've had to address and debate in this chamber, the bill gives a sense of there being forward motion, with, in fact, the impact being fairly negligible. That's a huge concern, Speaker.

You and I and many of the people in this chamber have gone door to door in our ridings, talked to people at the door. I've talked to people in my riding who have come to the door clearly exhausted, particularly seniors, women, who are looking after husbands who have severe health problems: Alzheimer's, cardiac conditions. They're exhausted. They need much more than this bill. Certainly they need to be in a position where family can come and help them when they have an extreme situation, but they need ongoing support, which they currently can't get. So not only does the primary person who's dealing with the illness have great difficulties, suffering from lack of support, but their caregiver has their health pushed to the limit, their health endangered as well.

I don't see a reason to vote against this bill, but I don't expect a huge improvement in the situation if it does pass.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Wellington-Halton Hills, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to thank the members who offered comments with respect to the remarks that I made this morning. The Minister of Labour intervened as well.

I would invite the government members to participate in this debate this morning. I'm not sure why the government members—there are a number of them here. The ranks are a little thin this morning, I have to say, in the House, but at the same time there appears to be a quorum, and we would certainly invite the Liberal members to participate in this bill. If they feel so strongly about it and believe so passionately that Bill 30 needs to be passed, I encourage them to stand up and talk about Bill 30. We would certainly be interested in their views, and we can continue to debate this issue.

I thought the member for Nickel Belt and the member for Oshawa made constructive suggestions with respect to my comments. Both of them talked about the lack of flexibility for real family situations. You may need a half a day off, but you actually have to take a week off under this legislation, unpaid. That doesn't provide the flexibility that many families would need if they're facing these situations.

The member for Nickel Belt said everybody has a heart—employers and employees—and I certainly agree with that. As I said in my comments, the vast majority of employers and workplaces, when they want to retain good employees, are willing to make compromises in

terms of these kinds of situations. Prudent employers who want to retain their excellent staff keep informed about their family situations to the extent that it's possible, and if an employee is facing a family crisis, they would want to ensure that that employee has the opportunity to address it in a compassionate way. We all have families, we all have hearts, as the member for Nickel Belt said. I have confidence that the vast majority of employers are already prepared to do this without the need for government legislation.

The Minister of Labour said that this is a very pressing issue, but it's interesting that the House has been debating this for almost seven months.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm proud to join the debate on Bill 30, the Family Caregiver Leave Act. I know that our outstanding labour critic, the member for Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, and our deputy critic, the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex, have both previously spoken very eloquently, outlining some very serious concerns with this bill. I have to tell you that I tend to join with them in questioning the purpose of this particular piece of legislation that we're debating this morning.

Of course, I want to start by stressing that I think every member of this House, and indeed every Ontarian, has the utmost respect for family caregivers. If I believed that this bill, as it's currently written, would do anything to extend real help to these families and individuals, I know that the members of our caucus would be supportive.

But certainly, as a representative in Leeds and Grenville, I have to say that I speak from a little bit of experience. Like so many people in my riding and across the province, I have a very personal understanding of the incredible stress and strain that accompanies an illness in the family. It's a difficult, almost heart-wrenching process to care for a loved one who is ill. There's the pain and heartbreak of seeing someone you love, whether it's a parent, a sibling, a spouse or a child, become seriously ill and knowing, in too many cases, that they won't recover.

This heartbreak is compounded when the role of a caregiver is suddenly thrust upon a family. Immediately, grief is compounded with the fear of the unknown. There's no training to prepare for the role of a family caregiver and the physical, financial and emotional toll that it would take on a family. I know that you can't schedule when the call is going to come for help. It could be in the middle of the day, in the middle of the night or anywhere in between. It's a monumental task that can overwhelm even the strongest and most resourceful of individuals and families. So I want to take the first part of my time to applaud every family member in this province who selflessly puts their own lives and those of their families on hold in order to care for someone they love in their most vulnerable state.

My questions about the bill aren't to suggest that I don't have compassion for family caregivers. But I'm

afraid that I'm very disappointed in seeing that this bill fails to deliver really anything meaningful to the table this morning.

On its surface, the bill sounds very well intentioned. Employees will be provided up to eight weeks of unpaid leave to care for a loved one who suffers from a serious illness. But again, I want to go back to the comments from the member for Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, who stated during the earlier debate that this is yet another piece of legislation that the McGuinty Liberals have thrust upon this House without any due diligence. It sounds very promising on the surface, but again, as I think he said or perhaps the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex said, once you shine the light of scrutiny on the bill, you really start to see the flaws that are there.

There are too many examples in this province of what happens when this government rushes through a piece of legislation without consultation. You could even say, Minister, that that's one without proper consultation. The Green Energy Act, as certainly we all acknowledge on this side of the House, has tremendous flaws. We have consistently, over the last several months, tried to put forward some very strong amendments and strong bills to resolve that. I remember, as a relatively new member of this Legislature, being in a committee that debated the Far North Act and all of the changes as this government opposite thrust that through without consultation. Once again, we're seeing that with the Family Caregiver Leave Act.

The minister has simply failed to consult with key stakeholders. She even mentioned this morning in her remarks that she mentioned the bill when speaking to the Human Resources Professionals Association. She even had a chat with some of the members after her remarks. With respect, I must say, Minister, that's a very, very poor way to have consultation on a bill. Personally, I wouldn't be bragging about it here this morning.

Only a government like this one, that has run roughshod over business with increased red tape and regulation, would come and speak to a group and acknowledge that they're consulting with them after they've already tabled a piece of legislation.

The minister also talked about this statistic this morning, which she mentioned that day with HRP, where they did a survey and showed that 95.6% of their respondents looked favourably upon the concept of family caregiver leave. Well, of course they do. Who wouldn't, without having the bill in front of them, agree with that concept? I'm actually surprised it's not 100% rather than 95.6%. But I'm sure that if they had seen Bill 30 at the time, there would be no way that there would be 95.6%. Why? Because these same HRP professionals would be dealing with a vague piece of legislation that foists yet more regulations and red tape onto them.

In fact, if the minister truly wanted to consult HRP, I bet you that some of the questions I would guess they would ask would have been included in this bill, questions like: Why isn't something as basic as serious illness

defined in this act? How do businesses manage to afford replacing workers who are on leave, particularly the small businesses?" Ontario businesses already have had five new leaves of absence created in the past seven years. The question I'm sure some of these professionals would ask is, do we really need a sixth? Real consultation, I think, would have raised those types of questions and allowed them to be incorporated in the act before its presentation, not when it was presented during committee.

I know many of my colleagues have talked about engaging in more discussion with some of the stakeholders during the next phase of this bill. But I guess, when you look at a piece of legislation, as a Legislature, you really have to ask two questions: Does a problem exist? And will this law fix it?

Minister, in this case, I don't think anyone on this side of the House, on the government side of the House, has indicated a problem exists. In fact, as the member for Wellington—Halton Hills said, we're getting very little action from the government this morning in this debate. I think they're missing the opportunity to talk about whether a problem exists. If a problem does exist, then stand up in your place and talk about it.

In fact, I would suggest that the minister can't demonstrate any meaningful way that Ontario employers are currently denying their employees companionate leave. Yet we're debating legislation that presumes there's a problem and that it's up to a government, this government, to fix it. I have to tell you that businesses are extremely skeptical of that government trying to fix a problem through legislation.

Let's get back to the assumption of the bill, because certainly, Speaker, the government opposite wouldn't play any games with this bill. The underlying implication of Bill 30—I have just a few moments left—is that employers large and small aren't providing this compassion. One of the things that I want to close with is this government's lack of support for the business sector. I can remember back at the end of February, February 29, the refusal of the government opposite to support the motion of our leader, Tim Hudak, to continue the planned reduction of the business tax. They said during the election that they would support it and then they turned tail and ran from it on February 29.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands recessed till 10:30.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I'm delighted to stand on behalf of my colleague Deb Matthews and me and introduce some very special guests here to support Kendra Squire, who is one of the pages. We have Phil Squire and Yolanda Squire, her parents; grandmother Mariane

Vantol; grandfather Peter Vantol; and great-uncle Harry Linstram. I ask everybody to welcome them here to the Legislature.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I would like to welcome Mrs. Dace Phillips, a retired Bell Canada employee who resides in the riding of Richmond Hill. She is joined today by her daughter Alex Phillips, who happens to be a member of my staff. I want to welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: We have a guest in the House who has travelled a long way to see us today, and that is Dr. Charles Mulli from Mully Children's Family in Kenya. He's accompanied today by Frank Tilley, the chair of the Mully Children's foundation in Canada. Many members will remember they helped to raise a bulldozer that was sent over to that country and has done remarkable work. Dr. Mulli is here.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It gives me great pleasure to introduce my wife, Patty Fedeli, who is here in the gallery today.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I would like to welcome to the Legislature today, seated in the east members' gallery, Gyanendra Badgaiyan, Kahan Singh Pannu, Ajeet Singh Pannu and Nidhi Sharma. They are four members of the 115-member Indian administrative services team on a week-long foreign-study training mission in Toronto. They are in the House today to observe question period and also to take in a tour of our historic Legislative Building.

Mr. Speaker, IAS officers in India perform the same function as our deputy ministers and ADMs in the Ontario public service, and I want to extend them a very warm welcome.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's my pleasure to introduce the family of page Hannah Symington in the west members' gallery: her mom, Rev. Joanne Symington, and her brother Nathan. They're visiting Queen's Park. Thank you, and welcome here today.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to invite everyone today to join with us in our Tibetan community in room 228 for some fabulous Tibetan food and an experience of Tibetan culture. That's right after question period, in room 228.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I am pleased to introduce in the members' gallery two special individuals from the riding of Niagara Falls. I have Peter Conradi, the publisher of *Bullet News Niagara*, and *Bullet News* reporter John Robbins. Peter lives in St. Catharines. John lives in Fort Erie. They're here today specifically to cover the second reading of my private member's bill for grandparents' rights under the Children's Law Reform Act. Welcome, Peter and John to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My wife has found where I work, and she has come to watch me work today. Welcome, Jenn.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I am pleased to introduce Ian Leaper of Mississauga, who won a lunch with his MPP and is here to watch question period for the first time.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It must be PC wives' day today at Queen's Park, Speaker. I would like to welcome my wife back to Queen's Park: Kate Bartz.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: It is my pleasure to welcome to the Ontario Legislature the grade 5 students from George B. Little Public School on Orton Park Road in Scarborough—Guildwood today.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I would like to introduce a good young student from Ryerson today visiting myself and Queen's Park: Ash Navabi.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd like to welcome Elio Riggillo and Louise Lambert, who are here today to collect on lunch with me, and I look forward to visiting with them.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: It's my privilege to welcome to Queen's Park this morning students from St. Mary's Catholic school of Campbellford, Ontario. Welcome.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted today to welcome Michele Farrugia here with us; he's here with Amy Swanson. Welcome, Michele. We're delighted to have you with us.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's a pleasure to welcome our summer intern from York University, Hasrat Kaur Grewal, and members of my staff—Fozy Ismail, Sharon Kaur and Christine Rettig—who make me look good every day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery a delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, led by the Speaker of the Parliamentary Assembly, His Excellency Milorad Živković. That delegation is accompanied today by Her Excellency Biljana Gutić-Bjelica, ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Canada. Welcome to our Legislature of Ontario.

It is now time for oral questions—I'm sorry, leader. I have another introduction in the gallery today.

We have with us in the Speaker's gallery as well officers from the Rajya Sabha, the upper House or the Senate of the Parliament of India. They are led by Secretary General Dr. V.K. Agnihotri. The delegation is here to meet with their professional counterparts, the senior directors of the Legislative Assembly staff. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature as well.

Now that I've read all my notes, it is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Later on this afternoon, the Ontario PC caucus will be proud to stand in unison with our colleague Jeff Yurek, the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London, in support of Bill 92, a mandatory public sector wage freeze.

Premier, you have dithered and delayed. You've talked about getting public sector pay under control but

have failed to do so for years. As a result, we're plummeting towards a \$30-billion deficit. When you're spending \$1.8 million more every hour, 24 hours a day, seven days a week than you've taken in revenue, the time for action is now. Premier, will you support this good bill by Mr. Yurek and bring in a public sector wage freeze to save us \$2 billion each and every year?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question, but I would recommend to my honourable colleague that he also talk a little bit about the other private member's bill put forward by one of his colleagues, the member from Haldimand—Norfolk, whose bill proposes that we limit compensation to the annual rate of economic growth. That does not constitute a freeze, Speaker.

The fact of the matter is, there are conflicting positions within the official opposition. I find it interesting that the leader of the official opposition has not put forward a bill in his own name. The fact of the matter is, he's choosing among options put forward by his caucus.

I believe we have a shared—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: —which is dealing with compensation issues, Speaker, but they're just going about it the wrong way.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, back to the Premier: The problem is, the Premier is heading in no direction on this. He has dithered; he has delayed now for many years. As a result, we're heading towards a \$30-billion deficit. We have been downgraded by Moody's, put on negative credit watch by DBRS. In fact, Premier, if we don't act today, I worry that we'll get another downgrade.

I met you in your office back on November 8. I suggested this item. You rejected it out of hand. I am not going to give up, because it's the right thing to do. It's a fair thing to do, to say to all of us in the public sector, "No pay increases in the next two years." It will save us \$2 billion a year. I'll be here this afternoon with every member of the PC caucus in one voice, saying, "Bring in a wage freeze. Support Bill 92." Will you do the same, sir?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, Speaker, I say to my honourable colleague that I appreciate the intention behind the proposed private member's bill; I recognize his enthusiasm as well, but I would recommend to him that he take a look at the experience in the other provinces. They've all rejected that approach, Speaker, notwithstanding their varying political stripes. The federal government has also rejected that particular approach.

My colleague makes constant reference to the credit rating agencies. They're not unimportant in all of this, but they're looking for consistency; they're looking for an approach that is designed to be effective. Our approach, Speaker, is thoughtful, it's balanced and it's going to be effective, and that's why we reject the approach being offered by my honourable colleague.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, the bond rating service has put you on negative watch. They've downgraded you. This is clearly an indication that they gave your recent budget a failing grade. The only thing holding that's holding this ship together currently, the only thing that's keeping us afloat, is low interest rates. We all know that interest rates are going to rise and we're going to pay higher interest as a result of the downgrades caused by your failed budget that increases spending and increases taxes. A 1% increase in interest rates will cost us \$500 million a year in new payments—that could be 250,000 MRIs.

Premier, enough with the excuses. Stop kicking this can down the road, because it is some can: a \$30-billion deficit. The time for decisive action is now. Will you support Bill 92 to bring in an across-the-board wage freeze and save us \$2 billion each and every year?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're not going to do it because it's not going to work. It's as simple as that.

Again, I say to my honourable colleague, we do have, in fact, some common ground here. We both understand that more than one half of the money that we spend on behalf of taxpayers goes into compensation. We both understand that there is a need to come to grips with that. I think that we have a much more thoughtful, a much more responsible approach, and it's guaranteed to be a much more effective approach when it comes to dealing with compensation in the province of Ontario.

I say to my honourable colleague, I commend him at least for putting forward a specific proposal. He was missing in action at the time of discussing the budget, Speaker, but at least he's making an effort today. It's just that he's going in the wrong direction.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: Premier, you had an opportunity. I sat down with you; we were about two feet apart at your desk. I put this package on the table. I said it will save us \$2 billion a year, and I said, "Premier, if we don't act, I worry we'll get downgraded." The Premier ignored my advice, and we got downgraded. We got a failing grade by the credit agencies, and I'm worried it's going to happen again.

So, Premier, no more delays. We've heard all of your excuses. For some time, you said, "Well, we'll count on the goodwill of the union leaders." For some time, the Premier said, "Well, we don't like a pay freeze because of the catch-up pay." Then he said, "Well, Don Drummond is against it," which wasn't true, but that was one of their excuses. Now they're hiding behind other methods of delay. We can't afford it, Speaker, when we're hitting \$1.8 million an hour, digging a deeper hole.

Premier, no more delays. The time for action is now. Will you bring in a public sector wage freeze to save us \$2 billion a year and get our books back in order?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We will achieve those savings, Speaker, but we'll just achieve them in a way that's effective, in a way that works.

My honourable colleague says he's interested in saving, but he opposes our corporate tax freeze. He says he's interested in saving, but he opposes our business education tax freeze. He wants to proceed with corporate tax cuts, business tax cuts, at this point in history when clearly we can't afford to do so.

Instead, our priority is to protect health care, to protect education and to hit the pause button when it comes to compensation. I think that's balanced; I think it's thoughtful; I think it's responsible. It's exactly what Ontarians want us to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, the evidence is clear. Your plan has been a dramatic failure. Look at the 50 agreements that were negotiated last fall and winter: 49 had wage increases, some of which were way above what's happening in the private sector. So the notion that he wants to continue down this path is going to dig us into an even deeper and deeper hole.

Let me ask the Premier about his approach, which seems to be waiting for one-offs and negotiating contracts when they expire.

Premier, our bill is for the whole broader public sector. You don't negotiate directly with colleges, you don't negotiate directly with universities, you don't negotiate directly with hospitals or municipalities. Our bill, Bill 92, is across the board in the broader public sector.

Premier, does your approach include a wage freeze for the sectors you don't negotiate with directly—colleges, universities, hospitals and municipalities—or will you let sleeping dogs lie?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would recommend to my honourable colleague that he take a look at a Supreme Court of Canada decision that dealt with—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Well, that body may not be of importance to them, Speaker, but I think it is to most Ontarians and Canadians.

I would recommend to them that they take a look at a particular decision that dealt with a measure adopted by the British Columbia government. They went ahead in the approach being recommended by my colleague. That matter was taken to court. It involved 9,000 employees. It ended up costing BC taxpayers \$85 million because of a mistake made by the BC government.

We have 1.2 million public sector employees, and I hesitate to think of the cost that would flow from this mistake were we to adopt this particular approach. So we're going to do something that is tried—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: —and designed to be effective on behalf of Ontario taxpayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Now, Speaker, we're at Liberal excuse number four. You had the Drummond, you had the catch-up pay, you had the goodwill of unions, and now a misinterpretation of a court case from 2001.

They say, "Well, we need to consult." I have in my hand a document that says, "Finance Minister to Launch Consultations with Employers and Labour Leaders on Compensation." They announced their consultation on July 19, 2010—more than two years of consultation, more than two years of delay. The time for action is now. And in British Columbia, they brought in a public sector wage freeze across the board. They're getting their books back in balance. It's time for action in Ontario.

You've had two years to act. You refuse to do so. The time is now. Support Bill 92. Rein in runaway spending. Balance the books in the province of Ontario. Get our economy moving again. Support a good bill that will help us get our financial house back in order. The time for decisive action—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.
Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think Ontarians know the difference between sound bites and sound public policy.

I think Ontarians are asking what happened to the leader of the official opposition who said, on December 15, 2009, "Where collective bargaining agreements exist, I think you need to respect the collective bargaining process." Then, in 2010, a year later, he said, "The approach that I think is the preferable approach, always, is the collective bargaining approach." Then, he said about a year later, "We'll consider all options on the table as a last resort...." Our first resort: open negotiations; bring their ideas to the table; we'll look for responsible leadership.

I think Ontarians are entitled to ask what happened to that leader of the official opposition. If they're going to be optimistic about the future, I want to them to consider that we're on the job. We know what we're doing. We're putting forward a thoughtful, responsible, effective approach.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, the Premier told this House that legislating wages at this point in time "is simplistic. It has been rejected by all the other provinces and the federal government, notwithstanding varying political stripes."

Can the Premier give us his opinion, then, Speaker, at what point it stops being simplistic to override collective bargaining?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I hope there are at least a few people watching the channel today, because they'll get a sense—the official opposition says that we're not going fast enough and the third party's telling us that we're going too fast. We're right in the middle. We find ourselves in the extreme centre, or, as I like to call it, the far middle. That's where we are as a party.

I say to my honourable colleague, we've set out our approach clearly in the budget. We will work as hard as

we can, in earnest and in all sincerity, with our public sector partners. We will sit down to the table. We'll do everything that we can to negotiate an agreement. But at the end of the day, we must ensure that we live up to a fiscal plan that we put in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This week, the Premier is saying that legislated wages will backfire, yet just a few weeks ago, he was insisting that he was more than ready to do exactly that. He actually called on the leader of the official opposition to help him with that job.

If the Premier knows that these schemes that we're talking about here are simplistic and that they are certain to fail, why, then, does he plan to use them?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: What I'm saying is, first we talk—first we talk. My honourable colleague the leader of the official opposition renounces the talking approach. I think it's very important that we sit down and enter into discussions with our teachers, with our doctors, with our broader public sector partners, through their direct employers. That's an important process which we uphold, and I think my colleague the leader of the third party does as well.

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But we have to say something else on behalf of Ontario taxpayers. At the end of the day, if those discussions do not prove to be fruitful, if they don't secure the agreement that we need to live up to our fiscal plan, then we will have to resort to other measures. We've been clear about that from day one.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, with each passing day, it gets less clear where the Premier actually stands. In fact, people are wondering if he actually knows where he stands anymore.

Just yesterday, the Premier noted that legislated wage schemes have actually failed in BC, failed in Ottawa, and they're going to fail if they're tried in the context here in Ontario. They've created pointless conflict and higher cost. If these simplistic schemes won't work, why does the Premier keep saying that he's willing to try them? If he has some secret plan, when is he going to share it with the people of Ontario and the other leaders across the country who haven't yet been able to crack the code?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: So, again, for the benefit of those watching, what we have here in the official opposition—this would be the iron fist, this would be the velvet glove, and I think we're probably a combination of the two. We're trying to go about this with a velvet fist, Speaker.

We feel a sense of responsibility. We think that we owe it to our public sector partners, with whom we have worked so hard and so well and so effectively on behalf of Ontarians, whether it's in our schools, in our health care system, in our colleges, in our universities and so many other sectors around the province—we owe it to them and we owe it to ourselves to sit down and work as hard as we can to come to terms.

But what we're saying as well, on behalf of all Ontario taxpayers, is, we've got to hit the pause button for a couple of years, given our fiscal circumstances. I think most people understand that.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier. Yesterday, the Premier also stated: "We're into difficult discussions with our teachers, our partners there." In fact, today I think he actually used the word "sincerity" when he talked about those discussions. Yet most teacher representatives have actually walked away from bargaining in total frustration with the government. So can the Premier clarify exactly who it is that he's talking to these days?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I can say—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Trinity—Spadina, come to order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: —that discussions in fact do continue with our teachers. It would be our preference that more be represented there, but the fact of the matter is, the table is up and running. We continue to have discussions, and we always welcome the return of all of our federation partners.

I say as well, on the doctor front, that the Minister of Health had a very good meeting yesterday with representatives of Ontario doctors, and we look forward to fruitful discussions as we move forward into the future.

I think my honourable colleague recognizes these are not easy things, these are not easy discussions, but I believe there is a repository, a residue, of goodwill to be found in all of our public sector partners. They understand how far we've come together, they understand our fiscal reality, and they want to be part of the solution.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I've heard a lot from the people who teach our kids, who clean the schools and keep them safe, and they understand very well that times are tough and that money is tight. In fact, many have already said that they're ready to accept a wage freeze. But when they look to the Premier for a respectful discussion, they see him peddling simplistic schemes that he knows are not going to work—in fact, schemes that he plans to vote against this afternoon. Is the Premier really ready to roll up his sleeves and do the hard work that's necessary in collective bargaining?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would recommend to my honourable colleague, as I would to our public sector partners, that they take a look at our eight-year history and our previous two mandates as a government.

Let's take a look at our schools. We've had no strikes, we have smaller classes, we have higher test scores, we have higher graduation rates—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, come to order, for the second time.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We have a much higher rate of participation in our colleges and universities. I think we've made some tremendous progress. The fact of the matter is, while we can put in place some policy directions, while we can provide additional funding, at the end of the day we count on those people who work in our education system to deliver for us. They have delivered in a most remarkable way. We're considered to have the best schools now in the English-speaking world, and the credit for that lies with those people who work on the front lines. That's the record that we have with education in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: There's no doubt that it isn't always easy to reach across those divisions and find the solutions that work, but it beats the simplistic schemes that are destined to fail every single time.

Is the Premier prepared to make it clear today that he really does reject those simplistic schemes, and is he ready to actually roll up his sleeves and bargain appropriately and meaningfully, with a mind to getting negotiated collective agreements in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I think the leader of the third party has, in that last question, come very close to accurately representing what we've been doing for a long, long time now. The fact of the matter is that we have rejected simplistic solutions. We have, in fact, embraced a sincere discussion process with our public sector partners. It is not easy. These are difficult and challenging discussions that we are having. But again, we approached this in a respectful manner.

We believe that there is a tremendous amount of goodwill, based on the record that we've established with our teachers and doctors, for example, during the course of the past eight years. We think there's an understanding of our fiscal reality. We think there's a determination to come to grips with this by working together. We think that there is an honest belief on the part of all of our public sector partners that they've got to be part of the solution. We think that is to be found in hitting the pause button for a couple of years so that, together, we can inform our plans and live up to the fiscal reality of our day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'd like to make a point. Just in case you missed it, I've already started identifying individual members.

New question.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Premier. Premier, since 2003, public sector compensation has grown over 46%. Now, 55 cents of every dollar spent by the government goes to wages and benefits. These habits have led us down a path where we face a \$30-billion deficit by 2017. This prognosis erodes confidence in our province's finances and kills jobs. Moody's has told you this is a problem, S&P has told you this is a problem, and

the 600,000 unemployed Ontarians should show you that this is a problem. We need immediate and decisive action, and yet you've brought forward a budget that increases spending and makes it harder to do business in Ontario. Why, Mr. Premier, at a time when we need strong leadership, are you so intent on killing jobs by not taking necessary action to control the size and cost of government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the government is taking that action. As the Premier indicated earlier in question period, he is doing it in what I would call a responsible fashion that has a reasonable probability of passing and withstanding court challenge.

I would remind the member opposite: Over the course of the last three years we have in fact brought down the average rate of settlement below private sector agreements, below the federal government and below municipalities. There is in fact more to do. We have laid out a plan that takes \$6 billion out of compensation over the next three years. We need to achieve that in order to get back to balance.

Our current budget deficit is in the order of \$15 billion, and it is going down. We made important investments in hiring teachers and bringing on more doctors, and we're glad we did that because that's what Ontarians needed.

Our plan is responsible; it's balanced. It will be successful, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Back to the Premier: Mr. Premier, our high deficits are killing jobs. Our province is the greatest province, yet nobody is investing here. Just last week, Timken in my riding announced it's closing its doors—another 150 jobs to the 6,000 jobs that have been lost due to your negligence. Your neglect and weak leadership will ensure that our 64-month streak of unemployment remains the highest in Canada. Further, your 2010 promise to negotiate a wage freeze was a failure.

This afternoon, we debate my private member's bill, which will save our province \$2 billion annually by mandating a public sector wage freeze. This bill will send a strong message to the credit rating agencies, businesses and investors, making Ontario strong again, and they will create jobs here and we will be the economic engine of Confederation.

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Because you've proven you can't do this yourself, will you at least stand up with the PC Party this afternoon and commit to reducing the deficit and—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: No. In fact, the very day you introduced your bill, your colleague over there introduced another bill that ties wage increases to GDP—the

very, very same day. And on February 26 of this year, the member from Frontenac—I apologize if I've got the wrong riding; Lanark-Frontenac—wrote a piece in the National Post saying that Ontario should tie government wages to economic performance.

Mr. Speaker, you've got three different positions from three different members. They are, again, absent without leadership. Their plan would fail miserably, just like British Columbia's did. That's why Ottawa didn't do it. That's why Alberta didn't do it. That's why Saskatchewan didn't do it. That's why Manitoba didn't do it. That's why Quebec didn't do it. That's why Newfoundland didn't do it. That's why Nova Scotia didn't do it.

We have a responsible plan that will get the budget back to balance as we move to protect health and education from the kind of cuts that that party would impose on them.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre.

Yesterday in public accounts, former Ornge chief operating officer Tom Lepine said that when he presented Ornge's corporate structure to the Ministry of Health, well, the ministry official looked worried, but they only asked a single question. They asked, "Had Alfred Apps"—the president of the Liberal Party—"signed off on it?"

I would like to know, Mr. Speaker: Is the approval of a well-connected Liberal insider all it takes for this government to rubber-stamp a hare-brained scheme like Ornge's corporate structure?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. John Milloy: As members know, the public accounts committee is seized with this matter, and they're basing it upon a very thorough report which was done by the Auditor General.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General came forward with recommendations which the Minister of Health has implemented, with the sole exception of the missing piece, which is Bill 50, a piece of legislation in front of this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, this is about taking action to correct problems at Ornge. We certainly acknowledge on this side of the House that there were weaknesses. The Minister of Health has moved forward.

But, again, Mr. Speaker, if the honourable member wants to hold hearings here on the floor of the House, then perhaps she wants to explain about correspondence that was received by the NDP in December 2010 and why they did not raise concerns at that point. Let's talk about the very, very close ties, increasingly close ties, between Ornge and the Progressive Conservative—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Back to the Premier: Last week, memos came to light from ministry staff saying that legal

counsel had serious concerns about the performance agreement for Ornge. Now we are learning that in this government, as long as the scheme passes the nod test of a well-connected Liberal insider, it doesn't matter if there are red flags; it doesn't matter if there are alarm bells from advisers and staff; it doesn't matter if there is testimony from whistleblowers or if there are questions from MPPs. It is all ignored.

Does the Premier seriously think that his minister is doing her job when well-connected Liberal insiders have greater say than her ministry staff?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, Mr. Speaker, if the member wishes to hold hearings during question period, let's talk about the fact that a very senior Ornge executive, a senior aviation expert, said he opposed the move to Oshawa for a variety of reasons. Despite that, we saw a barrage of lobbying coming from very well-connected Progressive Conservatives. In fact, according to the Toronto Star, they received an email sent by a prominent Conservative, a former Conservative, Matthew Ellis. He's the agency's director of government relations, and he said, "Jim Flaherty is eagerly waiting a decision on whether or not we'll be going to Oshawa." Ellis sent another email stating, "Any answer on Oshawa base? I'm being confronted by two Flahertys, Chris Alexander"—the Conservative MP for the riding of Ajax-Pickering—and "several candidates at an event."

If the honourable member wants to raise concerns about influence, let's talk about—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

PESTICIDES

Mr. Phil McNeely: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Our government is committed to protecting families and children through tough environmental laws that shield Ontarians from toxic chemicals. One such enforcement measure is the cosmetic pesticides ban. It has been nearly three years since this ban came into effect in Ontario. Speaker, through you, would the Minister of the Environment please provide the House with an update on the implementation of the cosmetic pesticides ban since it was introduced?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much for an excellent question. As the member would know, to protect Ontario families and improve our environment, our government brought in the cosmetic pesticides ban. This ban provides for the most comprehensive restrictions on cosmetic pesticide use in all of North America. It reduces the unnecessary risks of harmful, cancer-causing pesticides being used for cosmetic purposes. More than 90 pesticide ingredients are banned for cosmetic uses in Ontario.

Since the ban came in to effect, concentrations of pesticides in urban waterways have decreased by 80%. We continue to focus on outreach and education, helping Ontarians to learn how to care for their lawns and gardens using greener products and practices.

I was disappointed that both the Conservatives and the NDP voted against—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. James J. Bradley:—that cosmetic use of pesticides on our lawns and gardens. I expected that of the Conservatives, not of the NDP—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I would like to thank the minister for his answer.

Reducing the use, creation and release of toxic substances, such as pesticides, into the environment is crucial to protecting the health of Ontarians. I understand that several health organizations, such as the Ontario family physicians' association and the Ontario Public Health Association, have come out in support of our government's ban on cosmetic pesticide use.

Through you, Speaker, I am wondering if the minister could share with the House what these two organizations have to say about the ban and the strong action we have taken to protect Ontario children and families.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I just happen to have two quotes that would answer this question. First: "The Ontario College of Family Physicians solidly supports a province-wide ban on the use of cosmetic pesticides. Our research demonstrates the many health effects associated with pesticides. On behalf of our most vulnerable patients, the children of this province, we are pleased to hear that government has moved so quickly to develop this important legislation." That's Jan Kasperski, who is the chief executive officer, Ontario College of Family Physicians.

Then Connie Uetrecht, executive director, Ontario Public Health Association, says the following: "The Ontario Public Health Association is pleased to see a ban on the use and sale of pesticides for cosmetic purposes. This enabling legislation is another positive step the McGuinty government is taking to protect the health of our children and our environment."

I hope that the NDP this time will join with the government instead of the Conservatives—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, given your past statements, and in fact your statements here in the House today, I think it's important for all of us that you clarify your position with respect to a legislated public sector wage freeze.

On the one hand, you say there are legal impediments to imposing a freeze, and you're citing continuously the 2007 Supreme Court case involving British Columbia as your justification. But on the other side, you say you will legislate a public sector wage freeze if necessary. You can't have it both ways, Minister. Which one is it?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Actually, it—

Interjections.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Actually, you have to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, who is not in his seat, will not heckle.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Actually, Mr. Speaker, it seems evident—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton will not take his place.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: —that the Conservatives have not read the Supreme Court decision and, of course, they didn't read the budget either.

But first of all, the Supreme Court decision calls for consultation and negotiation. It threw out a legislated freeze. It cost, I think, \$85 million to the government of British Columbia. Last year, the government of British Columbia moved in a very different direction, which the Leader of the Opposition failed to point out. In fact, they brought forward a policy that was very similar to our previous one. That's why the federal government did not move to freeze wages until after they had—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: —extensive negotiations. I have a great deal of respect for the finance minister of the federal government; I only wish his colleagues here in the provincial Legislature did, Mr. Speaker.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the minister that I have read all of the cases on this subject and not just the few selected ones that he's relying on. You should know that the BC case has been found to be overly broad in its application, and other more recent cases have established that "the courts cannot close their eyes to the periodic occurrence of financial emergencies when measures must be taken to juggle priorities to see a government through the crisis." And I would note that this decision was supported again in 2011 by our own courts here in Ontario.

Minister, we're in a dismal financial situation here in Ontario. You need to take urgent action to avoid a fourth credit downgrade, and you cannot hide behind your selective legal rulings. You know that there is no legal barrier to prevent a legislated public sector wage freeze, so will you stop the political posturing and vote for our motion for a legislated public sector wage freeze?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, there's a reason why every province and the federal government have rejected what they are suggesting. There is a reason why her colleagues from Lanark-Frontenac and Mr. Barrett have also rejected that approach: because it won't work. It won't survive a court challenge.

The member is going in the same direction. The official opposition is moving in the same direction. We just have a different approach. We have laid out our approach, Mr. Speaker. We have laid out bargaining man-

dates as contracts come available. We are going through the consultation, the negotiation that the courts call upon us to do. We are acting with the benefit of very good legal advice, both from within the government and outside the government. We're confident this is the right approach. This will help us achieve the balanced budget plan that we've laid out in the budget, and we believe it's the responsible approach to take to collective bargaining and working with all of our partners in the public—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is to the Premier. The community start-up and maintenance benefit provides emergency financial support to help families on social assistance to avoid homelessness. Your government cancelled this benefit in the recent budget. During Niagara Week discussions this week, we learned that this cancellation will in fact increase homelessness and it will increase the demand for homelessness and housing services. We already knew that in the Niagara region they are severely underfunded by this government with respect to meeting their current needs. Why is the government making cuts that will increase homelessness in Niagara and failing to give them enough money to deal with the people that need it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the question. I also appreciated the opportunity to meet with representatives from the region of Niagara during the week that they were here and to have a very good discussion about many of the innovative activities and actions that they're taking to reduce poverty and in fact to address the issue of homelessness.

The honourable member may be aware that we are in fact moving forward with the first phase of consolidation of a number of housing programs, most under my ministry, that are actually being transferred to MMAH as part of a long-term affordable housing strategy. It will give communities the opportunity to address issues of homelessness and those that are at risk of homelessness by giving them the flexibility to work outside the rules. As part of that, we are in the process of winding up the community start-up and maintenance benefit and transferring a portion of that money over as part of this new program.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Back to the Premier: In the recent budget, the government also put a \$10 cap on the so-called discretionary benefits for social assistance recipients. These benefits help people with funerals, hearing aids, prosthetics, assistive devices, glasses, dentures, wheelchair batteries. The city of Hamilton has been forced to step forward to protect these benefits by investing 1.8 million of local taxpayer dollars to meet the needs of this program, and a \$4-million cost for 2013. Why is

the government cutting essential supports for people on social assistance and leaving our municipalities, which are cash-strapped already, with an impossible task of trying to meet the needs of these people?

Hon. John Milloy: There were some tough choices that we had to make in this budget, but the fact of the matter is, no party has a monopoly when it comes to compassion for those who are poor or those who are facing homelessness in this province.

I am proud of our record when it comes to poverty reduction. I've said in the House before that, during the recent election campaign, I went out for a debate on poverty, and it took me four tries to find the three sentences that the NDP had buried in their platform when it came to poverty.

The fact of the matter is, I am proud of the investments we have made in terms of affordable housing—the hundreds of millions of dollars. We have built more affordable housing than any other government. I correct myself, Mr. Speaker: the billions we've put into affordable housing.

I am proud of the efforts we have made in terms of the Ontario child benefit—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: —in terms of the increases to social assistance, OW and ODSP—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Attorney General, come to order.

Hon. John Milloy: —to initiatives like full-day learning, creating the Healthy Smiles Ontario program and raising the minimum wage, and we are right now anxiously awaiting one of the most comprehensive reviews of social assistance in the history of this province.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Mr. Kim Craiton: My question is directed to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. The World Health Organization uses May 31 each year to underscore the health risks associated with tobacco use and to advocate for effective government policies to reduce consumption.

Ontario has come a long way since we have been in power, making consistent strides to make the province smoke-free. However, tobacco remains the leading cause of preventable death and disease in Ontario. The urgency of this situation is undeniable.

Through you, Speaker, to the minister: What is the government doing to continue to make Ontario a tobacco-free province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It was six years ago today, May 31, 2006, that I stood with my colleagues in this House. I was proud to have been part of a government that passed the Smoke-Free Ontario Act.

Since then, Ontario has become known around the world as a leader in tobacco control. We have done far more than any previous Ontario government to address

the harm caused by tobacco use. We established a province-wide law for smoke-free bars, restaurants and other enclosed workplaces; we launched the tobacco industry cost-recovery litigation; and we've introduced legislation against contraband tobacco, to restrict industry from lowering their prices to attract customers, especially youth.

We have come a long way in the past six years, but there is definitely more to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Kim Craiton: My supplementary question is directed to the Minister of Health. The costs associated with smoking in Ontario are huge. The cost for the Ontario health care system because of smoking is pegged at \$1.93 billion in direct health care costs and \$5.8 billion each year in productivity loss, and on top of that, the loss of life.

What's most frustrating is that they are entirely preventable. Let's not lull ourselves into thinking tobacco use is simply a lifestyle choice or a habit; it is truly an addiction. I remember, when I worked in the tobacco fields, priming tobacco and picking tobacco leaves, that at the end of the day I was covered in nicotine. From that day forward, I never smoked, because I wasn't going to have what was on the outside of me in the inside of me.

Through you, Speaker, to the minister: How, specifically, will Ontarians be assisted to combat this addiction that we have in this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What a wonderful, wonderful question. I do want to take this opportunity, though, to acknowledge that the member from Ottawa West—Nepean, when he was mayor of Ottawa, led the country in bringing in legislation to restrict smoking. Congratulations to Bob Chiarelli on that.

We do need to be taking a cross-government approach to support our efforts. We are working with our partners and other ministries to help prevent young people from becoming addicted to tobacco, and we're making it easier for smokers to get the help they need to quit, and reducing the demand for all tobacco products, both legal and illegal. We're helping smokers quit by funding nicotine replacement therapy, and that includes gum and patches and counselling provided by family health teams, community health centres and addiction agencies.

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This renewed strategy is all part of our action plan for health care, which aims to make Ontario the healthiest place to grow up and grow old.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health. On Tuesday of this week, I advised the House that the new CEO of Ornge, Mr. Ron McKerlie, has admitted to the Ministry of Health that it's becoming increasingly more difficult for Ornge to properly staff its response teams with qualified paramedics. The solution proposed by Mr. McKerlie is to water down the regulations to allow Ornge to staff their

medic crews with a single paramedic rather than the two paramedics that are required by regulation now.

Based on the minister's response on Tuesday, she was apparently not aware of this request. I trust that the minister has had sufficient time to inform herself. Will she commit today to take the advice of her emergency health services branch and deny Ornge the request to water down those regulations?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, there is absolutely no change in requirements for paramedics. Once again, the member opposite has got a little bit of information and fails to tell the whole story.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Well, Speaker, this leaked cabinet document dated May 23, 2012, which is fairly recent, has the following note: "In April 2012, Ornge indicated that it intends to prepare a business case, seeking regulatory changes to support single medic staffing...." Since then, we know that Mr. McKerlie has had a meeting with the Ministry of Health. Why is it that the minister doesn't know about that?

If, in fact, she understands that there are no changes to regulations about paramedic staffing, will she stand in her place now and commit to this House that she will not approve any request by Ornge to water down the regulations for paramedic staffing?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, as I say, the member opposite sometimes gets a little bit of the story right but does not get the whole story right. This is yet another example. There is no request made, and no approval will be given, Speaker.

But as the member opposite continues to attack the front-line staff at Ornge, continues to criticize the people who are delivering care, I want you to know that I stand firmly with the people who just yesterday, Speaker, transferred 65 patients to the care that they needed.

I can assure you that I am absolutely committed to finishing the job of getting Ornge back on track. That final piece is Bill 50. I challenge the member opposite to stand up and say he'll quit obstructing the passage of Bill 50.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, before the 2007 election, this government promised the people of Windsor that they would redevelop the Windsor Grace hospital into a long-term-care facility. After breaking that promise, they then promised a fund to clean up the site. Not only has the province left the city bogged down with the work, they have imposed an arbitrary deadline, leaving some at the city to raise concerns that the province will once again renege on their promise to clean up that site.

Will this government set the record straight on their funding commitment to clean up the former Grace hospital without any arbitrary deadlines?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I'm very—oh, sorry.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.
Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, come to order.

The Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am just so eager to answer this question that—I apologize—I did not wait for the referral.

Speaker, I can absolutely tell the member opposite that, thanks to the excellent work of the members from Windsor West and Windsor-Tecumseh, we remain committed to supporting the cleanup of the old site. We know that there has not been the speedy construction of this most-needed—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —long-term-care home, but we are committed to get this building built and people moved in as quickly as possible—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Members of the community in Windsor are not all that confident in the ministry's ability to clean up the site. There's a monument that exists to the failure, and that is the Grace Hospital site. In a blistering editorial published yesterday in the Windsor Star, they wrote about the situation: "Finance Minister Dwight Duncan and Health Minister Deb Matthews don't just have short memories on that front. After squeaking through the last election, they appear to have developed amnesia. We can assure them the citizens of Windsor have not," and neither have New Democrats.

Again, I will ask: Will the government assure the people of Windsor that they will provide the full funding needed to rehabilitate this site without any arbitrary deadlines?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, our commitment in Windsor I think is quite extraordinary. This new long-term-care home builds on a very strong record: a new cancer centre, a new medical school in Windsor, new hospital redevelopment. We know that we've already invested significantly in long-term care in Windsor. We are determined to do what's right for the people of Windsor. Windsor has very, very strong advocates in our caucus. We will continue to build health care in Windsor.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. It sounds like May 31 is going to be a very busy day because May 31 is also the fifth anniversary of the release of the report of the Ipperwash inquiry and Justice Linden's 100 recommendations.

We all know that the tragic events of 1995 led to Premier McGuinty calling the Ipperwash inquiry after we were elected to government in 2003. This was one of the first actions we took as a government, and it signalled a shift in Ontario's relationship with aboriginal people.

Can the minister please tell us what progress we have made in our province's relationship with aboriginal

people since the release of the Ipperwash recommendations five years ago?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm very pleased to be able to talk about the progress that we've made as a province when it comes to working with our aboriginal partners, not only since the release of the report but since we formed government.

Our government has made it a priority to work with aboriginal partners to ensure that all in Ontario have the best quality of life possible. We've used the Ipperwash inquiry as our guide. We've made real progress in establishing positive relationships with aboriginal people and communities.

I want to talk about one tangible example of this new relationship. Premier McGuinty started a tradition here at Queen's Park to have an annual meeting with aboriginal leaders to talk about opportunities and shared responsibilities, moving forward. We had this year's meeting just a couple of weeks ago, and we had productive and respectful conversations with First Nations and Métis leadership, along with representatives from the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres and the Ontario Native Women's Association.

We know that there's a lot more work to do, Mr. Speaker, but that relationship and that foundation is what is going to allow us to move together forward—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Minister, it's encouraging to know that we are moving forward in partnership with aboriginal communities in Ontario. Having a positive relationship allows us to work together to maximize all of the opportunities that are available.

But Minister, although it's important to have a positive relationship, Justice Linden made 100 recommendations in his report on the Ipperwash inquiry, and we committed to addressing those.

Speaker, through you to the minister, what progress have we made in addressing the Ipperwash recommendations?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I appreciate the member from Guelph raising this question because I think it's really important to track what we've been doing, because we're committed to implementing the Ipperwash recommendations.

The majority of the recommendations have either been addressed or are currently being addressed, but more importantly, we've established a new relationship with our aboriginal communities, and we used the Ipperwash recommendations as a framework to guide us.

1130

Let me highlight a couple of the recommendations that demonstrate what we've already done. We're the government that created a stand-alone Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs with a dedicated deputy minister and minister. Under previous governments, this important ministry didn't even exist.

We created the new relationship fund to help First Nations and Métis communities more effectively engage

with government and the private sector on important land resource and other development initiatives, with a total funding commitment of \$85 million to date.

So not only have we built on the relationship and created mechanisms, we've also funded those mechanisms so that the relationship can be built.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, you have maintained on a number of occasions that the personal information of Ontario residents who have purchased licences through your ministry is safe and secure. You failed to comprehend the scope of security legislation in the United States. As far back as August 2004, an assessment of the US Patriot Act by the Privacy Commissioner of Canada states, "Once personal information about Canadians is transferred outside Canada ... the laws of the country to which the information has been transferred will apply. Those laws will determine when government agencies such as the police, security and tax authorities can obtain access to that personal information."

Minister, do you now admit that what you told this House about the protection of this information was incorrect?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I appreciate the question very much. Certainly, as I have stated on more than one occasion, we take the privacy issue very, very seriously. We've actually had an opportunity, as well, to speak recently with the company that was awarded the contract. They understand and continue to stand by the requirements that, indeed, they protect the privacy of people. They do not disclose indirectly or directly any information or collect any information that could lead to the loss of privacy for the people of the province of Ontario. They're respecting the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

What I can tell you is that this is an issue we take very seriously, one that we have had an opportunity to speak about with the company. That, of course, was built into the contract with the company at the very beginning of this process, once they were awarded the contract. We continue to feel confident that, indeed, the privacy of Ontarians is safe—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Well, Minister, I know that you've talked to the company, as you've said, but, really, have you talked to the government of the United States? That is where the problem lies.

Minister, when MNR awarded this contract to an American company, your ministry officials were either very sloppy in their research on this subject or you and your staff made the conscious decision that you didn't care about protecting the personal information of Ontario citizens. Which was it: incompetence or indifference?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, again, the contract was awarded after a fair, competitive process.

Active Outdoors was awarded the contract based on that fair, competitive process. We were very, very clear at the very beginning of the process, in the building of the contract with the company, how important the issue of privacy was. It was built in to make sure that we protected the privacy of Ontarians. It was built in to make sure that the company recognized that the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act in Ontario should prevail. Indeed, the company has acknowledged and more than accepted that. They've made it clear to us that they will continue do that.

Again, there will be no opportunity for the company—and they will not be directly or indirectly collecting or gathering data related to Ontarians. They certainly cannot use that information without in any way contacting our ministry, and there has been no—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Michael Gravelle:—request made so far. We are confident that, indeed, the protection—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. The member is reminded that when I say thank you, you are finished.

New question.

CASINOS

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Finance. This morning, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence spoke out against his government's plans for a casino in Toronto. He said, "I don't want one ... I don't want a big casino in Toronto." But not only is his government ignoring his concerns around the caucus table, they won't even let him cast a ballot in a municipal referendum on casinos.

Why is the minister ignoring the member from Eglinton–Lawrence and the thousands of other people who want a say and a referendum on a casino in their community?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite knows well that the government is offering the opportunity to the municipality of Toronto and other GTA municipalities to invite a casino or a gaming destination into their jurisdictions. It will be up to the local municipalities, Mr. Speaker, as to whether or not they wish to host one. The municipality now, under the Municipal Act, does have the ability to have a referendum. I invite all members to participate in this very vigorous debate about how we best optimize the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., the proceeds of which we use to build better hospitals and better schools all across Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is never too late to warn someone—never.

Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: The Harris government had many faults, probably too many for all of us to remember, but even they allowed people like the member from Eglinton–Lawrence to cast a vote on a casino. By the way, the vote in Toronto back in those days went two to

one against having a casino in Toronto. How can the minister think that a council resolution or some flimsy consultation process can overturn a decision made directly by the people?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The regulations governing this leave it to the choice of municipalities, Mr. Speaker. They have a variety of tools available to them with which they can make a decision. They can in fact conduct a referendum based on existing legislation, and we look forward to a number of municipalities that have expressed an interest in hosting gaming sites, having an adequate and comprehensive consultation with their citizens. We invite that, and we invite the views of all members of this Legislature, indeed of all citizens of Ontario, as we move forward to make the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. stronger so it provides more revenue to support our health care and education.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The time for questions is over.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: When they get here, I'd like to introduce Jonathan Klassen and members of the Morningstar Christian School of Millbank, which is in my riding of Perth–Wellington.

Miss Monique Taylor: Today I'd like to stand to welcome to the House—unfortunately, they are not here at the moment, but they were here earlier—the grade 5 students from École Monseigneur-de-Laval, who were here from Hamilton, so welcome to the House today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WATERLOO AIR SHOW

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to take this opportunity to encourage members of this House and people across the province to attend the fourth annual Waterloo Air Show this weekend at the Waterloo region international airport. I've had the pleasure, in fact, of going to this event in the past, and I can tell you there's something to do for every member of the family. The world-famous Snowbirds will be back this year, as well as a Kitchener–Waterloo favourite, Captain Paco, who flies the CF-18 Demo Hornet. But there will also be some new performers, like Pete McLeod, the only Canadian pilot in the Red Bull Air Race Challenge, and Otto the Helicopter, a unique and versatile chopper that can chew gum, blow bubbles and fly at the same time.

Over the years, support for this exceptional event has grown steadily among fans and the Canadian military. The Royal Canadian Air Force has continually worked to make this air show the success it is today, showcasing

some of its most impressive planes to more than 40,000 spectators. It's this dedication, along with the hard work and commitment of more than 150 volunteers, that makes the Waterloo Air Show bigger and better each and every year.

I hope many of you will be able to come out to Waterloo region, either on June 2 or 3, to experience this memorable event.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member for his statement about me. I can do four things at the same time—tap-dance as well.

ALAN KING

Ms. Cindy Forster: I rise today to recognize a good friend, community activist and coordinator of Canal View Homes in Welland, where my constituency office is located. Alan King, who celebrated his 65th birthday in May, is retiring June 1. He has held this position since Canal View, operated by Open Door Concepts, a non-profit housing corporation, opened its doors in 1991.

Alan has a rich history of helping those in need going back to the early 1970s when he worked for the Toronto Distress Centre, and also with civil rights activist Cesar Chavez, who fought for the rights of farm workers. He was an ordained priest working with the Scarboro mission society in Amazonas, Brazil. He left the society in 1990 and married Rosina Bisci, who worked in Peru, and they had a daughter, Sara.

Alan is also a volunteer firefighter with the Port Robinson Fire Hall and has been there for nearly 20 years.

Alan King is one of the most down-to-earth, committed people I have ever met. His work day in and day out was aimed at the tenants, many with special needs, to ensure they had the best services possible. He created a family atmosphere, with many events for tenants and the community to get involved. He always went that extra mile. He will be greatly missed.

On behalf of my office staff, the community, and everyone at Canal View, thanks, Alan.

DOUG FIELD

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'd like to take this opportunity today to recognize the extraordinary passion and the dedication exhibited by a member of the Oakville community. For decades, Doug Field has championed the preservation and the celebration of traditional brass band music. As the general manager of Intrada Brass, Doug worked with his ensemble to revitalize the presence of brass music in Canadian society.

Like the neighbourhood and workplace bands that established this genre as a cultural foothold in Britain more than 100 years ago, Intrada Brass is also defined by a sense of community. The ensemble's performers travel from towns across southern Ontario and rehearse in my community of Oakville before then performing across the province, bringing together audiences for the purpose of

enjoying and appreciating both the band's music and one another's company.

Intrada's diverse repertoire includes a vast selection of compositions by Canadian composers. Doug has been keen to showcase these in an effort to celebrate the British brass tradition, but in a distinctly Canadian way.

His lifetime of passion and commitment has led him to enrich our national music community by introducing a new generation of Canadians to the long-standing and ever-evolving brass band tradition.

On behalf of the members of the Oakville community, Speaker, I'd like to wish Doug all the best as he retires from a career that's brought nothing but great things to the people of my community.

STRATFORD HOUSE OF BLESSING

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Earlier this month, I saw firsthand the way that the Stratford House of Blessing is strengthening our community. The House of Blessing is just that, a house of blessing. It's a blessing to those who are struggling in our area.

Florence Kehl founded the House of Blessing in 1983. Florence is a tireless volunteer, a Stratford Citizen of the Year and recipient of the Queen's Jubilee Award. The House of Blessing provides a safe place of comfort and practical help for those in need socially, spiritually, physically and economically. They provide backpacks to children. They provide education on healthy cooking and financial management. They provide food and clothes for families in need.

But the House of Blessing needs our support. They're seeing more mouths to feed and they need more food on the shelves. This is a challenging time.

I want to thank the volunteers, staff members and generous donors who make it possible for the House of Blessing to do its good work. I also want to thank Theresa McMurray, executive director of the House of Blessing, as well as Laura Devries, operations coordinator, for their leadership.

I support their work, and I urge all MPPs to support our local food banks and other agencies that help those who need it most. Let's do our part.

CONCESSION STREETFEST

Miss Monique Taylor: Today, I'm happy to stand in the House and welcome back a community event in my riding of Hamilton Mountain. This Saturday marks the 16th occasion of the Concession Street BIA annual Streetfest. This terrific family event starts at 11 a.m. and goes right through to 6 p.m., with the farmers' market starting a wee bit earlier, at 7 a.m. Concession Streetfest will once again close down the street to vehicles and open it up to food vendors, buskers, local arts and crafts, live music and so much more.

One of the highlights of Saturday's event will be the challenge of breaking a Guinness world record for kazoo players. The current record is held by the BBC Radio 3

Big Red Nose Show, who brought 5,190 kazoo players together at the Royal Albert Hall in London, England. Concession BIA is hoping to have 5,200 players to break this record. Kazoos will be provided. Registration begins at 10:30, and the challenge begins at 2 p.m.

I'm hoping that all Hamilton and beyond will come out to support this challenge and our local BIA. It will definitely be fun for the entire family.

JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY OF OTTAWA

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm very pleased to rise today to share a significant milestone for an important organization in my community of Ottawa. I'm sure all members are familiar with the work of the John Howard Society and the vital services and assistance they offer individuals in our communities who have had or are at risk of interactions with our criminal justice system.

On June 20 this year, the John Howard Society of Ottawa is celebrating 60 years of community service. I want to take this opportunity to commend the really important work they do, day in and day out. They truly deserve our appreciation and support.

The mission of the John Howard Society is to offer effective, just and humane responses to crime, its causes and its consequences. They strive to help their clients make positive choices and reintegrate into society, which benefits all members of our community. Through services for adults, youth, families, and in employment, they work tirelessly to help people in what can often be hours of their greatest need.

And in doing this work, their values speak to the values that we hold up as a progressive and thoughtful society, in how we treat those who have found themselves involved in the justice or corrections system. They believe that all individuals have intrinsic worth, are to be treated with dignity, equality, confidentiality, fairness and compassion, have a right to self-determination without infringing on the rights of others, have the capacity for change and have the right to be informed.

Speaker, I want to wish the John Howard Society of Ottawa a happy 60th birthday. I again commend them for the important work they do on all our behalf in making Ontario and Canada a better place for all our citizens.

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RON SMITH

Mr. Steve Clark: I rise today to pay tribute to Ron Smith, a sports reporter who's been putting Leeds-Grenville athletes in the spotlight for more than three decades.

Smith recently announced his retirement from the Brockville Recorder and Times newspaper after 37 years with the daily, including the last 33 as its sports editor. Fittingly, he'll hit the final keystroke in his legendary career after the city of Brockville hosts its biggest-ever sports event next month, the all-Ontario high school track and field championships.

For generations of athletes, Smith was a familiar face on the sidelines. His professional coverage made them feel like they were pros and no doubt helped propel many of those young athletes to greater glories. His stories and photographs captured forever some of the best moments of their lives. I'm sure that there are scrapbooks stuffed with his clippings and that they are deeply cherished possessions in countless homes in Leeds and Grenville.

Smith's passion for local sports wasn't limited to documenting what was happening at the games. He was also very involved in organizing, coaching and officiating. For the past 19 years, he's been coordinating the Brockville and Area Sports Hall of Fame induction ceremony with broadcaster Bruce Wylie. They've inducted 100 sports figures, and I expect some day soon Ron will have his plaque hanging beside them.

On a personal note, my wife, Deanna, and I had the pleasure of being former colleagues. We both worked at the Brockville Recorder and Times with Ron. We affectionately called the newspaper the Rip and Tear.

Ron, you've had an amazing career, and for your unwavering commitment, our community thanks you.

COMPUTER EDUCATION

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Last week I had the pleasure of visiting SATEC, a part of Porter Collegiate Institute, a local high school in my riding, where students presented a 24-core/6 research supercomputer that they had built and programmed.

This project was accomplished mostly by grade 11 students, who took part in a joint initiative with SciNet and the Canadian Young Scientist Journal.

Under the teaching and supervision of Dr. Jonathan Dursi from the University of Toronto's SciNet and Dr. Sacha Noukhovitch from Porter Collegiate, the students expanded their knowledge of both building and programming supercomputers.

These students were able to build a comparable version of the world-known IBM Blue Gene and began the project by running software models of the big bang theory and Conway's Game of Life.

The supercomputer is the first of its kind here in Ontario. Never before has such technologically advanced academic research taken place in a high school setting. The success I witnessed first-hand at Porter Collegiate was made possible by our government's commitment towards education and innovation.

Mr. Speaker, Porter Collegiate is a testament to how schools should be empowering our children to reach higher levels of critical thinking.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Principal George Mavraganis at Porter Collegiate for allowing new and innovative ways to teach and inspire his students. He inspired me as well.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Randy Hillier: For the past nine years, Carleton Place and District Memorial Hospital has been appealing

to the Ministry of Health for redevelopment funding and approval. The population growth in Carleton Place in this time has been significant and demand for services and beds has increased well beyond the hospital's ability to serve under its current conditions.

Unfortunately, the Carleton Place hospital board has had to weave its way through a maze of bureaucratic nonsense to get any action whatsoever. The hospital board has had to deal with countless arms of the Ministry of Health, yet neither the LHIN nor the capital funding branch will commit to the board that the redevelopment will move forward.

Ministry of Health staff have presented the proposal to cabinet with a recommendation to move forward, yet this government has stalled and it's not proceeding. This government has demonstrated that hospital proposals are promises, and promises are nothing but a political football that can be punted about at a whim in an attempt to score political gain.

It is disappointing because the people of my riding expect that a redeveloped hospital in Carleton Place is essential to their health care. They believe that political and electoral gain ought not to be the determining factors in hospital funding.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Moridi assumes ballot item number 49 and Mr. Flynn assumes ballot item number 57.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ONTARIO JUSTICES OF THE PEACE MODERNIZATION ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LA MODERNISATION DE LA LOI SUR LES JUGES DE PAIX DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Orazietti moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 97, An Act to amend the Justices of the Peace Act with respect to categories and qualifications of justices of the peace / Projet de loi 97, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les juges de paix en ce qui concerne les catégories de juges de paix et les qualités requises.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. David Orazietti: The Justices of the Peace Act currently provides that every justice of the peace is a presiding justice of the peace. The bill amends the act to provide for two categories of justices of the peace,

presiding and administrative, and sets out the powers that may be exercised by each. The bill also provides that a person shall not be considered for appointment as a presiding justice of the peace unless he or she has at least five years of experience as a practising lawyer.

CONSUMER PROTECTION AMENDMENT ACT (MONEY TRANSFERS), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR (TRANSFERTS DE FONDS)

Mr. Singh moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 98, An Act to amend the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 with respect to money transfers / Projet de loi 98, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2002 sur la protection du consommateur en ce qui concerne les transferts de fonds.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: This bill amends the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, and essentially there are two purposes: The first purpose is to place a cap or a limit on the fees that a money transfer can charge consumers—that cap would be 5%; and it would require that the money transfer agency disclose information about exactly what the charges will be and what fees a consumer would have to pay. That's the purpose of this bill.

PETITIONS

WATER QUALITY

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to be first in reading a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

"Whereas under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, Ontario regulation 319/08, public health inspectors are required to undertake risk assessments of small drinking water systems;

"Whereas many of these small drinking water systems are located in homes operating bed and breakfasts in rural Ontario;

"Whereas private homes that are the sites of bed and breakfasts already have potable drinking water used by the homeowners and their families every day;

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"Whereas many of these bed and breakfasts have established the quality of their drinking water through years of regular testing;

"Whereas these home-based businesses are facing high costs to comply with the new requirements of regulation 319/08;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health amend Ontario regulation 319/08 to give the testing track record of a small drinking water system greater weight in the risk assessment process;

"Furthermore we, the undersigned, ask that bed and breakfasts operated within a private home with a drinking water supply meeting all the requirements of a private home not be subject to regulation 319/08."

I'm pleased to sign, endorse this and present it to Anthonie, one of the pages here at Queen's Park.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. John Vanthof: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission provides services which are vital to the north's economy; and

"Whereas it is a lifeline for the residents of northern communities who have no other source of public transportation; and

"Whereas the ONTC could be a vital link to the Ring of Fire;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the planned cancellation of the Northlander and the sale of the rest of the assets at Ontario Northland Transportation Commission be halted immediately."

I wholeheartedly agree, attach my signature and send it down with page Stavroula.

SERVICES DE LABORATOIRE

M. Grant Crack: « Pétition à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que nous demandons au gouvernement provincial une licence pour un laboratoire pour faire les prélèvements sanguins dans le canton de Russell;

« Nous, soussignés, adressons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario la pétition suivante :

« Dans notre région, il n'y a aucun service de laboratoire sanguin disponible au public. Les gens doivent se déplacer vers l'hôpital le plus près pour obtenir ce service essentiel. »

I agree with this petition, and I will sign it and hand it to page Hannah.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mrs. Julia Munro: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas citizens are concerned that contaminants in materials used as fill for pits and quarries may endanger water quality and the natural environment of the Oak Ridges moraine and the greenbelt;

"Whereas the Ministry of the Environment has a responsibility and a duty to protect the sensitive areas of the greenbelt and Oak Ridges moraine;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has the lead responsibility to provide the tools to lower-tier government to plan, protect and enforce clear, effective policies governing the application and permitting process for the placement of fill in abandoned pits and quarries;

"Whereas this process requires clarification regarding rules respecting what materials may be used to rehabilitate or fill abandoned pits and quarries;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask that the Minister of the Environment initiate a moratorium on the clean fill application and permit process on the Oak Ridges moraine and the greenbelt until there are clear rules; and we further ask that the provincial government take all necessary actions to protect our water and prevent contamination of the Oak Ridges moraine and the greenbelt."

As I am in agreement, I have affixed my signature to give it to page Dana.

TOURISM

Ms. Sarah Campbell: My petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas tourism is a vital contributor to the economy of northwestern Ontario, bringing hundreds of millions of dollars into the province's economy from other provinces and the United States, unlike other regions in the province whose target demographic is people who already reside in Ontario;

"Whereas northwestern Ontario's tourist economy has been under attack by government policies such as the cancellation of the spring bear hunt, the harmonized sales tax (HST), the strong Canadian dollar and difficulties passing through the Canada/United States border; and

"Whereas studies have shown that tourism in the northwest nets significantly more money per stay than other regions of the province, in part due to visitors frequenting historical sites, parks and other roadside attractions that they learn about through travel information centres;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To keep the travel information centres in Fort Frances, Kenora and Rainy River open permanently to ensure that northwestern Ontario maximizes the benefit of our tourist economy."

I proudly support this and will give this to page Kyra to deliver.

FAMILY CAREGIVER LEAVE

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition from Scarborough-Agincourt, addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which states:

"Whereas recovering from injuries or illnesses at home can enhance recovery, reduce the strain on our health care system and provide comfort to patients;

"Whereas family caregivers need to focus on what matters most—providing care and support to their loved one—without the fear of losing their job;

"Whereas Ontarians who need to care for seriously ill or injured loved ones need job protection;

"Whereas the Family Caregiver Leave Act, if passed, would build on existing family medical leave to provide up to eight weeks of unpaid job leave for employees to provide care and support to a sick or injured family member;

"Whereas the PCs have pledged to vote against the bill, and permanently kill the legislation;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That all parties recognize the importance of health, family, and job security by supporting the Family Caregiver Leave Act to protect the jobs of working Ontarians who need to care for seriously ill or injured loved ones."

I fully support the petition, affix my signature and give it to page Sherry.

TAXATION

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition presented to me from the vice-president of the CAW, Mr. Ron Svajlenko, which reads:

"Whereas the Ontario budget tabled on March 26 continues to give billions of dollars to already profitable corporations through corporate tax cuts implemented in 2004 and 2009; and

"Whereas the Ontario budget freezes social assistance, ignores the child care crisis, dramatically underfunds health care and education, and threatens thousands of jobs in communities across Ontario, in both the public and private sectors; and

"Whereas all Ontarians are being asked to pay for corporate handouts;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to restore the corporate tax rate to at least 14% and add additional tax brackets for those receiving \$250,000 or more in income and redirect this funding to:

"—increase social assistance for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program recipients to restore lost purchasing power;

"—address the child care crisis for children under four years of age;

"—increase funding for health care, education, and other social programs; and

"—reverse public staffing cuts to ensure Ontarians receive high-quality services; and finally

"We petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to introduce labour law reform that will improve workers' ability to exercise their right to improve their working conditions through free collective bargaining."

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present 1,005 signatures regarding "Auto insurance reform

needed: Protect consumers." This represents 4,374 petitions presented this week. The petition reads as follows:

"Whereas auto insurance rates are too high in the province of Ontario and continue to increase;

"Whereas families across the greater Toronto area (GTA) are facing unfair insurance premiums that have more to do with where they live than their accident history or driving ability; and

"Whereas insurance premiums across the GTA differ by as much as 150% for drivers with the same driving record;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Legislative Assembly undertake auto insurance reform that protects consumers, ensuring that premiums are based on a fair assessment of a driver's known ability and history, rather than unfairly targeting drivers on the basis of where they live."

I strongly support this petition, will affix my signature, and hand it to Angela and have her present it to you.

RADIATION SAFETY

Mr. Reza Moridi: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas subsection 6(2)8 of the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act identifies dental hygienists as persons deemed to be qualified to operate an X-ray machine; and

"Whereas dental hygienists in independent practice need to be able to prescribe X-rays and to be designated as radiation protection officers in order to provide their clients with safe and convenient access to a medically necessary procedure, as is already the case in many comparable jurisdictions;

"We, the dental hygienists in independent practice, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To express support for the motion filed on April 17, 2012, by the member from Richmond Hill that asks the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to establish a committee consisting of experts to review the Healing Arts Radiation Protection Act (1990) and its regulations and make recommendations on how to modernize this act and bring it to 21st-century standards, so that it becomes responsive to the safety of patients and the public and to include all forms of radiation that are currently used in the health care sector for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes."

I fully agree with this petition. I sign it and pass it on to page Gopi.

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HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert Bailey: My petition today is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government has announced that the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. will end its Hiawatha racetrack slots operations in Sarnia on March 31, 2013, even though the current agreement does not expire until 2018; and

"Whereas the end of this program will cost the city of Sarnia 140 jobs immediately and" over "\$1.5 million a year in gaming revenues, not to mention potentially 60,000 jobs across the province if the program is scrapped entirely; and

"Whereas there has been absolutely no consultation with the community, employees, or owner/operator of the local facility; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government continues to put more and more Ontarians out of work due to its ill-conceived, ad hoc decisions, including, in Sarnia, the loss of 80 jobs at the local jail, 100 jobs at Lambton generating station, and numerous others due to high energy costs on businesses;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the McGuinty government stop risking thousands of jobs in Ontario and \$1.5 billion in potential revenue by mismanaging the racetrack slots program and focus on finding solutions to the real problems that Ontario is facing."

I agree with this petition, affix my signature to the same and send it down with Anthonie.

CYCLING

Mr. Jonah Schein: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas 25% of Ontario adults regularly cycle and over 50% of children cycle either daily or weekly;

"Whereas a cycling fatality occurs every month in Ontario and thousands of cyclists are injured each month;

"Whereas Ontario is lagging behind provinces like British Columbia and Quebec that have invested \$31 million and \$200 million respectively in cycling infrastructure;

"Whereas investing in cycling infrastructure in Ontario will create jobs and benefit the economy, reduce traffic congestion and pollution, protect those sharing the road, and encourage active transportation;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario release a comprehensive cycling strategy for Ontario that includes dedicated funding to match municipal investments in cycling infrastructure, education initiatives to raise awareness about the rights and responsibilities of all road users, and a review and update of provincial legislation including the Highway Traffic Act and the Planning Act to ensure roadways are safe for all users;

"That the strategy set provincial targets and timelines for increasing the number of people who commute by bike and cycle recreationally."

I support this petition. I will sign my name to it and give it to page Colin.

LABORATORY SERVICES

Mr. Grant Crack: It's a privilege to be able to table this petition in both official languages.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we are asking the provincial government for a licence to operate a blood laboratory in the township of Russell;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"In our area, we do not have a blood laboratory service available to the public. The people of this township have to travel to the nearest hospital to get this service."

I agree with this, and I will sign it and give it to page Mateo.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I can't let a day go by without an Ornge petition.

"Whereas a report from Ontario's Auditor General on the province's air ambulance service, Ornge, found a web of questionable financial deals where tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars have been wasted and public safety compromised;

"Whereas Ornge officials created a 'mini-conglomerate' of private entities that enriched former senior officers and left taxpayers on the hook for \$300 million in debt;

"Whereas government funding for Ornge climbed 20% to \$700 million, while the number of patients it airlifted actually declined;

"Whereas a subsidiary of Ornge bought the head office building in Mississauga for just over \$15 million and then leased it back to Ornge at a rate 40% higher than fair market rent;

"Whereas the Liberal Minister of Health completely failed in her duty to provide proper oversight of Ornge;

"Whereas this latest scandal follows the eHealth boondoggle where \$2 billion in health dollars have been wasted;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The government of Ontario immediately appoint a special all-party select committee to investigate the scandals surrounding Ornge."

I obviously support this petition, affix my name and give it to page Daxime to take to the table.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The time for petitions has expired.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC SECTOR COMPENSATION FREEZE ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE GEL GLOBAL DE LA RÉMUNÉRATION DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC

Mr. Yurek moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 92, An Act to freeze compensation for two years in the public sector / *Projet de loi 92, Loi visant à geler la rémunération pendant deux ans dans le secteur public.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation. Mr. Yurek.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. I'm pleased to rise as a member of the Legislature and a representative of my riding, Elgin–Middlesex–London, to debate the important piece of legislation, Bill 92, the Comprehensive Public Sector Compensation Freeze Act.

Since last summer, the PC Party has been out in front of this issue. Although I was not a member of the caucus at the time, many of my colleagues here spent their eight last years in opposition of a Liberal majority government. In that time, my colleagues watched as the McGuinty Liberals increased government spending by 77% and doubled a provincial debt that took 23 Premiers over 100 years to accumulate. I'd also point out that at the same time, Ontario lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs.

This pattern of spending, with complete disregard for the economic consequences, has saddled us with a \$15-billion deficit in this upcoming year. More alarming still is the fact that this year's budget continues on the same path that has brought us to this point. Instead of reducing spending, the McGuinty government has increased spending by \$2 billion. And we have been warned that if this pattern persists, by 2017, Ontario's expenditures will exceed our revenues by \$30 billion and our debt will have grown to \$411 billion. In a McGuinty not-too-distant future, a baby born in 2017 will, before it even opens its eyes, be responsible for \$30,000 of provincial debt. That, my friends, will be the share for every man, woman and child in this province if we do not take immediate action today.

As I said, it's not like this problem has surprised us. My colleagues here in the PC caucus have been critical of the McGuinty Liberals' dangerous spending habits for the last nine years. Certainly since last summer, we have been calling on the government to put a freeze on the single biggest driver of costs in our budget: public sector wages and benefits. The PC Party has been out in front of this issue because we know that high deficits and debt are detrimental to this province.

Last summer, I can somewhat understand the Liberals ignoring our warnings. They were in election mode; they didn't want advice, however good, from another party. But now I firmly believe this issue is more important than the partisan games. That is why we continued to push forward our wage freeze policy after the election. And at the end of the day, it is good policy. It will save \$2 billion a year for a province that finds itself at the edge of a fiscal cliff. By reducing the deficit, this bill will take a decisive step towards getting Ontario's economic fundamentals right.

After the election, our leader, Tim Hudak, met with the Premier and warned him that the path he was putting us on would inevitably lead us to a credit downgrade. Maybe the Premier just didn't believe him—because this

is Ontario and, after all, Ontario has been the economic engine of Confederation and one of the most prosperous provinces. However, our Premier's tenure, his feeble leadership, has brought about a number of records that no self-respecting Ontarian could be proud of.

Our once-vibrant manufacturing sector has been decimated, with over 300,000 jobs lost since 2003. We experienced the unprecedented reclassification from a have to a have-not province. Our unemployment rate has been above the national average for 64 months. If our provincial unemployment rate were indeed a baseball hit streak, we'd be putting Joe DiMaggio to shame. Unfortunately, it's not a hit streak; it's a reflection of drastic underperformance—underperformance that stems from the government's complete oblivion to the economic realities in which we live.

While the Premier may not have believed our leader when he was told that we'd face a credit downgrade, surely the Premier can't ignore it now, because we've experienced a downgrade from various rating agencies on four separate occasions. And yet, despite all the warning flags that prompt a good, studious leader into action, our Premier has stalled. What I do have to marvel at, though, is that the Premier does not seem the least bit concerned about the half-million people unemployed or the fact that our debt is becoming riskier by the day. He continues, with unabated vigour, spending taxpayers' money and driving us further to the brink.

The Liberal government seems content with avoiding action and with the rest of the platitudes of how their values in education and health care are at risk. The problem with this picture is, if you're not committed to reining in government spending and reducing the deficit, you don't value health care and education. I can say that unabashedly because, if we experience a 1% rise in our interest rate, that will add another \$500 million to the already \$11 billion we spend annually servicing our debt. The \$500 million could be used to pay for 12,000 first-year elementary teachers, 8,700 first-year nurses or 250,000 MRI exams. Instead of investing in these essential services, under the Premier's leadership we seem destined to funnel that money into interest charges. That is why this bill is so important.

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Public sector wages account for 55 cents of every dollar of government money spent each year. It is the single largest cost driver, although if we let the Premier continue, perhaps interest charges will one day be the single largest cost driver. Therefore, the first step to rein in our behemoth of a deficit, which towers over all the other provinces, is to freeze public sector compensation for two years. This is a fair approach and one that will allow us to pump the brakes and save \$2 billion a year.

But consider the following. From 2004 to 2010, the growth in public sector compensation averaged 4.99%. This compares to an inflation rate that averaged 1.94%. In total, public compensation increased by 46%. These statistics show it is clear that the Premier's affinity for spending and nothing else is the reason we are in the

precarious fiscal state we now face. This is an untenable situation. And the worst part about it is that the Premier does not seem to understand that private sector job creation is inexorably linked to the province's fiscal health.

Businesses look at the health of a location's government because they know a heavily indebted province will not be able to afford the things that make the province attractive for doing business. Things like infrastructure, a skilled workforce and hospitals: all of these are important for a business. Further, a high debt indicates that government will have to raise taxes in the future and add to the cost of them doing business.

Ontario deserves better than this. We are now at a point where public sector compensation exceeds private sector compensation by 27%. This creates a major imbalance in our labour market. In healthy economies, the private sector receives a higher wage level than the public sector. The reason for this: Working in the private sector carries less job security, and therefore people need to be compensated appropriately. Paying the public sector substantially more creates an imbalance that can have devastating effects.

I say "devastating effects" because if you take a look at Greece, Spain or Portugal, some of the least admired economies in the world, the European Central Bank found that public sector workers in those countries earned substantially more than their private sector counterparts. This imbalance, no doubt, played a significant role in those countries' slide into economic chaos.

On the other hand, productive countries like France and Germany have wage ratios less than one. If you're a businessman, where would you like to invest: Germany or Greece? I think the answer is pretty clear. I would never, ever say that Ontario is Greece, but the economic fundamentals that the Premier seems intent on abiding by are heading us down that path. That is why the PC Party is taking action to set the fundamentals right. My colleagues have taken steps to ensure that Ontario will be the place to do business in the future.

My colleague from Chatham-Kent-Essex has proposed legislation to reduce the regulatory burden that costs businesses \$11 billion a year. The member from Nipissing introduced a white paper that treats the province's energy policy the way it should be: a cornerstone of economic development and prosperity. And my colleague from Simcoe North has been travelling around the province to consult with and take action on behalf of Ontario's tradespeople, who are the backbone of our economy and who have been thrown under the bus by the current government in order to erect their union-friendly College of Trades.

Unfortunately, our fears have continually been realized. We feared becoming a have-not province, and we have. We feared a credit downgrade, and it happened. These blemishes are completely the responsibility of the Premier, and yet he still fails to take the decisive and noble action we expect of our leaders.

Today my colleagues and I stand up for fiscal responsibility. We stand up for job creation. We ask that

people in this Legislature put aside their partisanship and support this bill for the sake of Ontario. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Trinity-Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thanks very much, Speaker. What I want to do is make sure that we allow the leader of the NDP to speak first, and then I will do my turn after that, if you don't mind.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your indulgence and, of course, that of the members in the House as well.

It's interesting, because this debate is about a bill that really follows up on the conversation that we were having this morning in question period. It's an interesting conversation and one that is described, I guess, by both the Liberals and the Conservatives as a conversation about a wage freeze. But really what we're talking about is a legislated solution to a problem that the government has in its inability to negotiate respectfully with the bargaining units of many, many people in this province.

It's interesting because it's very, very clear that these kinds of legislated wage schemes don't work. They don't work here; they haven't worked in other jurisdictions. It's very, very clear that this entire bill, as well as the government's proposals in terms of how they're going to get over this impasse, don't hold water. Yet we continue to spend time in the House both on a bill like this and on the government's intentions, as they keep restating them.

They are basically abandoning the bargaining process, notwithstanding the fact that they are talking about how they're still at the table. It's really, really clear that there are very few people left at that table, Speaker. I think that's a sad commentary on the ability or the willingness of the government to engage in a really respectful and serious conversation about how to overcome some of the issues.

I think everybody realizes that the problems have to be solved. Everybody realizes that the economy is a tough one, that the budget of the province, the deficit of the province, is a major concern. But I think what everybody else really should be up front and honest about is that legislated wage freezes, legislated wage-freeze schemes, simply are not the solution. They don't work. They have been roundly criticized by the Supreme Court of Canada. In fact, we talked about this again this morning as well, that there was a serious situation in BC where this exact kind of measure was undertaken, and the Supreme Court of Canada found that it was not a legal thing to do in Canada. It ended up costing the British Columbia government a significant amount of money, some \$85 million, because they did the wrong thing by their employees, by the bargaining units that they were supposed to be negotiating collective agreements with.

So I find it a little bit frustrating that we have a bill here that's obviously not something that can be done in Ontario. It's not legal to be done. We have a government that claims that they don't support this bill, and yet on the

other side of their mouth, they are saying that they're going to do the exact same thing.

I think what really needs to happen here is that we have to be sure that the people who do the work of Ontario, the people who make Ontario work, are actually engaged in a respectful process around their collective agreements. I think it's really, really clear that the attitude that the government has taken, notwithstanding what they say—the actions that they take, what they're doing at the bargaining table—is basically telling these folks, “It's my way or the highway. You do what we say; otherwise, we're going to legislate it.”

In fact, when they raised this spectre in their budget, in their throne speech, it was very, very clear that they were intending on taking this action in terms of legislating a solution. Well, I really don't understand, Speaker, how you can go into something called a “collective bargaining process” with integrity while you've already put the hammer down at the end of the process. You've already said quite clearly, “We're here to negotiate, but, really, we're only going to negotiate insofar as you agree to everything we say.” That's really not negotiating, Speaker. It's definitely not good-faith negotiating or good-faith bargaining.

I think it's pretty interesting that the table is very small now. Many, many people have walked away from that table where the bargaining should be happening, where the conversation should be taking place, because they have felt insulted by the process. I think it's clear that they have felt that the process has not been one of integrity, and that's why there are very few people left having the conversation. It seems like the government is confused about that, but I don't think it's confusing at all.

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I don't think the government even knows, I don't think the Liberals even know, where they stand anymore on these things. One day they say that this kind of initiative that the Conservatives have brought forward in their bill is something that doesn't work, and then the next day they say the very opposite, that in fact if they don't get their way at the bargaining table, they're going to do exactly what this bill purports to do. So the Liberals don't even know where they stand anymore on this kind of an issue. It's pretty confusing, not only for me, but for Ontarians as well. I think people in the province want to see the parties actually have a productive conversation about how we get over where we are right now.

Speaker, there are a number of details and facts that I'm not going to go through, but I have to say there's something that's very, very clear, and that is that the government does not have a good record of working with others and of co-operating, of figuring things out. But we've been able to show them how to do that through the budget process. We've been able to work with them on a number of things. I would only ask that they actually take that more open attitude over to the bargaining table when they're having this conversation with, in this case, the teachers—but there are the doctors, and there are a number of others as well.

One of the things that the government needs to understand is that the “my way or the highway” approach is one that's going to fail them every single time. What works is a collaborative approach. What works is a serious, respectful conversation. I would hope that the government actually gets to that place, whether it's with doctors, whether it's with teachers or whether it's with anybody else in terms of the bargaining, and quite frankly, whether it's with the opposition parties when it comes to how we make this minority Parliament work, because I think that it's clear that that can be done. We've shown that it can be done. They know that it can be done. I think that they need to take seriously their responsibility here, because I think that's what Ontarians expect of us, Speaker.

There's no doubt that it's a tough conversation. There's no doubt that it's a conversation that's going to mean give-and-take. But it's certainly not a conversation that should start with, “Do things exactly how I want them done or else we're just going to legislate your wage freeze.”

I want to end by saying I don't understand why there has been no productive outcome so far. It seems to me the government said, “We want a wage freeze.” Most of the teachers' unions came back, in the case of the teachers, and said, “We'll offer a wage freeze.” Well, holy smokes, it seems like if they ask for a wage freeze and they were offered a wage freeze, there's got to be a solution that's pretty much achievable, you would think. I would just ask the government, as they go through this debate on the Conservative bill, what exactly is the holdup? When you're asking for a freeze and they're offering a freeze, it sounds to me like the makings of the plan are afoot. It's about time you get down to the brass tacks and get this solved.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member from Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on Bill 92, which talks about a comprehensive public sector compensation freeze.

I'll just say at the outset that I will not be voting for this bill, and I'll tell you a very simple reason: because the scheme that is outlined in the bill is illegal, and I don't think this Legislature can vote for something that is not permissible under the law. That, I think, is a very important and simple principle that we all need to apply. The most supreme law of the land here in Canada is the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We need to abide by the obligations that are outlined in the charter, and one of the key obligations that's outlined in the charter is the right to association and right to collective bargaining. What this particular bill, Bill 92, is professing to do is rip collective bargaining agreements. That goes contrary to what's outlined in the charter.

So, Speaker, that's a very straightforward, simple reason. All governments—not just the government of Ontario—across the country, including the federal government, are under a duty to respect the collective

bargaining process, have the duty to work hard around the table and engage in good-faith negotiations with the unions, and that's the approach that is outlined and that needs to be followed. Legislating a wage freeze, as outlined in Bill 92, is only going to result in a higher cost for Ontarians because it will be deemed illegal, because there will be a situation in which it will be challenged in courts and can be thrown out.

I think the case in point is the Supreme Court decision from 2007 on health services in British Columbia, where the British Columbia government brought in similar legislation, which was challenged in court and went all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, and the Supreme Court of Canada found the legislation of British Columbia to be unconstitutional. In fact, that decision of the British Columbia government, in the end, resulted in a cost of about \$85 million to the taxpayers of British Columbia because they had to reverse that decision and had to pay the 9,000 workers who were affected by the decision.

In that particular decision, the Supreme Court was very categorical in articulating the application of the charter to the collective bargaining process. I want to take the time—because I think it's important and we've all talked about this, we've heard about this discussion in question period. There's obviously quite a bit of colourful rhetoric that's associated with it, but I think it's important at the end of the day to actually go to the decision and see what the Supreme Court justices have said, because their written word is tantamount to law, and it's important that we pay attention to that. That's why I want to read some key paragraphs from their decision, which speaks to this very specific issue, and it's important that we have that in Hansard.

In paragraph 90 of that Supreme Court decision, this is what the judgment reads: "It follows that the state must not substantially interfere with the ability of a union to exert meaningful influence over working conditions through a process of collective bargaining conducted in accordance with the duty to bargain in good faith. Thus the employees' right to collective bargaining imposes corresponding duties on the employer. It requires both employer and employees to meet and to bargain in good faith, in the pursuit of a common goal of peaceful and productive accommodation."

It's clearly articulated that both employer and employees are required to meet and bargain in good faith. Passing legislation of this nature does not meet that standard. It does not meet that test, because there is no meeting and bargaining in good faith if you just legislate a freeze, as has been suggested by the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London and supported by his party.

In another paragraph, paragraph 96, the justices go further and state: "Laws or state actions that prevent or deny meaningful discussion and consultation about working conditions between employees and their employer may substantially interfere with the activity of collective bargaining, as may laws that unilaterally nullify significant negotiated terms in existing collective agreements."

Again, it's clearly speaking to a situation like this, as has been contemplated by this particular proposed legislation. Undermining collective agreements by not sitting down around the table and engaging in good-faith bargaining is illegal under the Constitution, under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I'll read one more citation, Speaker, from paragraph 103, where the justices state: "The duty to bargain in good faith does not impose on the parties an obligation to conclude a collective agreement, nor does it include a duty to accept any particular contractual provisions. Nor does the duty to bargain in good faith preclude hard bargaining. The parties are free to adopt a 'tough position in the hope and expectation of being able to force the other side to agree to one's terms.'"

In other words, it's bargaining. Both parties need to come to the table. Both parties need to put their positions in front of each other. Both parties should engage in hard, tough bargaining in good faith, and that, Speaker, is a process that must be followed in order for it to be legal. Bill 92 is an illegal scheme. It's only going to cost taxpayers of Ontario more money, and therefore I will not be voting in favour of this particular bill.

1400

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: This afternoon, it is my pleasure to speak in favour of Bill 92, an act to freeze public sector compensation for two years. This bill would freeze all public salaried and hourly employees' wages and benefits. If passed in a timely manner, this bill will save the province \$4 billion: \$2 billion in the first year and \$2 billion in the second year.

Why do we need this bill? Because this government has squandered our money and we are in a deep financial crisis right now. We have a budget deficit of \$15 billion and a debt of \$240 billion. This bill would reduce our deficit by over 13%. We need to put this in place now so we can work on the other 87% of our annual unfunded liabilities.

Since 2003, this government has allowed the province's public sector wage costs to increase by 50%, to almost \$60 billion. On average, this government has increased public sector pay by 5% every year. Even during the recession years of 2008, 2009 and 2010, when everyone was experiencing economic hardship, the pay of Ontario's public sector employees continued to grow. Compared to the private sector, our public sector salaries are 35% higher. Fifty-five cents of every dollar this irresponsible government spends go to paying the employees.

The Liberals' mismanagement and unbridled spending binges of the last nine years have dug a hole in the province's financial future so deep that both Moody's and Standard and Poor's have lost confidence in Ontario. These credit rating agencies are watching us closely.

A public sector wage freeze is absolutely necessary. A public sector wage freeze would be a major step in the right direction toward restoring confidence in Ontario. A

public sector wage freeze would lessen the unfortunate and unfair burden that this government has placed on future generations of Ontarians.

Part of the genius of this proposal is that it would freeze wages across the board. It does not single out one group of employees and pit them against another. Everyone will share the load. Everyone will be asked to pay for this government's mistakes, just like all the taxpayers of Ontario have been doing for years.

So I ask you: Support this important proposal. We need to do it. We must reduce our spending. We must pass this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I have to say that it's very difficult for people like me to support a bill like this.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Unreasonable.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Because it is totally unreasonable, I think; absolutely. There's got to be a better way to do it.

I understand what the Tories are saying. We do have deficits and we do have debt, to which they have contributed in the past in a big way. We're all trying to deal with it. That's something that is a reasonable request to make.

We, in our friendly relations with the Liberals, have negotiated two things that bring in a little more revenue, which we think is good. Having government revenues is a good thing, because when you have money as a government, it means that you are able to, yes, in big part, reduce your deficit and, in big part, deal with the social deficit that we have created over the last 15 years.

Part of our negotiation with the Liberals was to introduce a surtax on—God bless—those who earn over \$500,000. I would contribute that today and yesterday if I had that kind of money. I'm even willing to give up a little more, even though I earn over \$100,000. People like me, yes, are willing to give a little more. We also said that we feel that the corporate sector needs to make a contribution to society; that they have social obligations—not just corporate obligations but social obligations; and that we have a right to ask of them that they give up a little something too, and that they give a little more. That is why freezing the corporate tax rate is a good thing, because eventually that will bring in 800 million or 900 million bucks. This is a good thing that we should be celebrating.

We have the lowest tax rate in the country: 27%. When you compare it to the states. Our combined federal and provincial rate is 27%, lower than most states. How much lower do you want it to go, and where is the evidence that these people have created jobs? There is none. Let's make sure that corporations give a little to society, and let's make sure that those who have money—big amounts of money—contribute just a little to make it better for us.

I tell you: As far as I know, teachers put on the table a zero sum, a zero increase, meaning no increase for the next two years. It's a funny thing that the teachers are

voluntarily saying, "We want zero," and the Conservatives seem to say—and the Liberals as well—no, it can't be voluntary; it has to be mandatory. We have to mandate a wage freeze for Tories to be happy.

It isn't good enough that teachers are saying, "We'll do it voluntarily." And the Liberals are quite happily saying, "Oh, no, we're trying to negotiate," even though they're getting that agreement from the teachers. But the Liberals seem to want more than that. It's not enough. They want to go after the grid; they want to go after pensions. And when they disagree with that, they'll say, "We're going to have to legislate a little more against the teachers."

You two parties are not too far from each other, I tell you, and I think you should work it out.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: This is such a fun debate. It began with the member on whom I almost called a point of order pursuant to standing order 23(b)(i), because the member from Elgin—Middlesex—London wouldn't even talk about his own bill. However, as he seems to have opened the door, let's have a little bit of fun with it.

You know, this is just the usual disjointed, self-serving, right-wing sloganeering nonsense that's imported from the US Republican Party. Really, if you like George W. Bush and his hard right-wing republican politics, at least have the courtesy to tell Ontarians that the fiscally bankrupt politics of the United States right wing is what you want to bring to Ontario.

Now, let's actually talk a little bit about the bill. No provincial jurisdiction has tried to impose a wage freeze on its bargaining public sector workforce at 0% since 2007, when the Supreme Court decided BC health services was in violation and, in fact, nullified it.

Now, here's the interesting part: This also represents yet another flip-flop by the Progressive Conservatives. Let me quote their leader. On December 15, 2009, "Where collective bargaining agreements exist, I think you need to respect the collective bargaining process." On November 9, 2010, "The approach that I think is the preferable approach, always, is the collective bargaining approach." On September 30, 2011, "We'll consider all options on the table as a last resort...." "Our first resort ... open negotiations, bring their ideas to the table, we'll look for responsible leadership."

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Who said that?

Mr. Bob Delaney: That's the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party. However, just seven weeks later, the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party says the PC caucus will be calling for a "legislated, mandatory wage freeze for public servants." Flip and flop.

We know that it won't stand up in court. We know that it will be struck down. We know that it's illegal. We know that it's going to cost Ontario taxpayers money. We also need to respect the collective bargaining process while balancing the budget.

The Supreme Court of Canada has provided a very clear road map to governments. They've said, "Consult

and bargain hard,” and that’s precisely what Ontario’s government is doing now with all of our bargaining units. We respect the collective bargaining process, but we will introduce legislation to achieve savings, if necessary. Our government respects public services, and we also respect the hard-working Ontarians who deliver those services to our families on the front lines.

1410

The PCs, of course, talk about a hypothetical \$2 billion in additional savings from a wage freeze, which is complete nonsense. However, they should stop playing games and support the only plan before this Legislature, which is this government’s 2012-13 budget, which actually will get us back to a balanced budget in 2017 and not to that \$30-billion mess the PC policies would take us toward. This is madness, and so is this legislated wage freeze.

We’ve seen it before. The last time we saw it is when our government was first elected in 2003, and it was, “Surprise, you’ve got a \$5.5-billion structural deficit.” Not only did this government eliminate that deficit, not only did we do it without gutting public services, but we also balanced the budget, ran into surplus three years in a row, paid down long-term debt and managed this province in a responsible fiscal manner.

When the recession hit, our government chose to lessen the impact on Ontarians by investing in our economy and in our key services, and that member and his party voted against each and every one of them. We were responsible for saving the auto sector, and that member and his party voted against it. They said, “Throw ‘em out the boat.” Support for the auto sector saved 400,000 direct and indirect jobs. The Conference Board of Canada estimates that the municipal infrastructure partnership saved 70,000 jobs in 2009 alone, and they voted against it. Shame.

Since the recessionary low, employment in Ontario has grown by nearly 300,000 net jobs. More people are working in Ontario now than were at the top of the last growth period.

For all of these reasons, Speaker, this bill is, to be polite, nonsense and I cannot support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: I’m pleased to take this opportunity to speak to what I think is the most important piece of legislation tabled this session to rein in runaway public spending in the province of Ontario. I’d like to thank the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London for introducing this very important bill.

The Premier has talked about getting government spending under control, but he has failed to do anything to take Ontario off its collision course with a \$30-billion deficit. The PC Party, however, understands that the first real step towards reducing the size and cost of government is implementing a mandatory, across-the-board public sector wage freeze, which will help Ontario save more than \$2 billion. Unlike the governing Liberals, we know a pay freeze isn’t about picking winners and losers

or about targeting doctors and teachers. Instead, it’s about treating all public sector workers equally. We on this side of the House believe that everyone must do their part to ensure that Ontario returns to a more sound financial footing.

Let’s be clear, Mr. Speaker. Action is required now. Ontario faces an unparalleled fiscal crisis. Moody’s has already downgraded Ontario’s debt, and Standard and Poor’s has put us on a negative outlook, meaning there’s a one-in-three chance they will downgrade us in their next review. This lack of confidence in the province’s finances hurts private sector job creation because many businesses are starting to doubt that Ontario can get its fiscal house in order.

We have to start reducing debt now to ensure we have sustained investment and job creation in the future. But to do that, as someone recently pointed out, we need to remember that we “can’t manage the deficit without addressing what is the single biggest line in our budget—public sector compensation.” You know who said that?

Mr. Todd Smith: Who?

Mr. Michael Harris: The finance minister.

Still, the Premier continues to show a lack of leadership. The Liberals would rather pick fights with teachers and doctors in a hopeless battle to negotiate pay freezes in the public sector, even though the Liberal government said it would legislate a wage freeze if necessary.

Here’s the reality: With roughly 2,600 collective agreements set to expire over the next three years, affecting nearly 700,000 public sector workers, there’s no way the Liberals’ one-off approach to wage restraint will work. Only a mandatory, across-the-board public sector wage freeze will do the job. That’s why I will be voting in favour of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It’s a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 92. I applaud my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London for taking the action this government has refused to take, time and time again. They have refused to take action, Speaker, despite the pressing and obvious need for doing so.

Just prior to last year’s election, the Auditor General released his pre-election report, which indicated that this government’s attempt at a voluntary wage freeze was a complete and utter failure. Not only were wages founded on collective agreements not frozen; they increased. According to this government’s own Ministry of Labour, wages rose 1.8% since 2010 alone.

Then, to add insult to injury, this government has chosen to vilify certain working groups over others. The current strife between the Premier and our province’s doctors springs to mind. Caught in the middle of all this are the services that our families rely on, including our seniors, which this government doesn’t seem to care much about. They’re caught in the middle because government cannot—indeed, it refuses to—get its spending under control. The services that families depend on are now in jeopardy because Ontario’s finances have turned

into a black hole after eight years of this government spending its problems away.

What happens when members like my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London stand up to offer good ideas, the tough ideas, to help rescue the province from the brink of disaster? This government turns up its collective nose and says, “Ignore the fact that the finance minister has driven us into debt. Ignore the fact that the Premier has alienated our doctors. We have everything well in hand, and there’s nothing more here to see.” And do they do it all without proper consultations with stakeholders? They continue to act as though they have a majority government.

As my colleagues have pointed out, there is much to see here. It’s worth repeating, Speaker, that the numbers support our position today. Growth in public sector wages has time and time again gone beyond the rate of inflation. In fact, since this government has taken office, pay for public sector employees has been above the per capita income in Ontario. That’s more than eight years that they have been unable or unwilling to tackle the problems head-on. I support every effort made by this side of the House to steer us away from a looming \$30-billion deficit, because families are not seeing that action from their government.

Let’s be clear about the challenge we face: 55 cents of every dollar the government spends is funnelled towards public sector compensation. Perhaps that’s a problem that could have been avoided if the government had successfully implemented the wage freeze they claimed so triumphantly in 2010. Instead, wages kept going up. Even after the freeze, Ontario’s ability to recover from the effects of a fiscally irresponsible government were further diminished.

Let’s remember, Speaker, that it’s the private sector that pays the public sector. It’s the private sector that has driven our economy for years. They are the ones that have been hit the hardest with job loss after job loss while public sector jobs continue to grow. It’s time the public sector, which has contributed to government overspending with pay increases and fat benefits and pensions, do their share to now reduce government overspending and agree to a public sector wage freeze. After all, it’s their children’s future that this government is mortgaging.

With that, Speaker, I stand firm in supporting my colleague’s bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s great to participate in this discussion on a very common-sense bill from our good friend from Elgin–Middlesex–London.

We’ve talked a lot about numbers. I don’t have a lot of numbers left on the clock, so I’ll go through them rather quickly: \$15.3 billion is the deficit; we’re heading for a \$400-billion debt in the province of Ontario—a tripling of the debt from when this government took office.

The finance minister stood in the House and said that his government had only increased the debt by 32%. He

was almost immediately contradicted by several independent analysts, who showed that the number was actually over 70%. So clearly the finance minister doesn’t quite understand the gravity of the situation. Neither does the member from Mississauga–Streetsville and apparently the other members from the government side who have spoken today. They’re living in a fantasy land over there. I often wondered what the population of fantasy land was, and I think it’s 52. I’ve come to that determination that maybe it’s 52.

1420

But I’m here to talk about Bill 92, okay? It represents exactly what the province needs at this time. The current budget has been called “Duncan’s missed opportunity.” S&P stated that Ontario’s outlook downgrade was due to its continuing weak budgetary and debt metrics. So this is the perfect opportunity to bring this in.

I spoke about it yesterday here in the House during question period. One in six young Ontarians are out of work. One in six—it’s completely unacceptable. It’s far higher than all parts of the globe. It’s unbelievable how high that number is. So we owe the kids a future in the province of Ontario. The member from Elgin–Middlesex–London said that \$30,000 is what they’re being born with in debt. It’s just not fair. I have two young daughters. We need to do what’s right. We need to get this right now and bring in a mandatory public sector wage freeze.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Elgin–Middlesex–London, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. I’d like to thank the leader of the third party, the member from Ottawa Centre, the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, the member for Trinity–Spadina and the members for Mississauga–Streetsville, Kitchener–Conestoga, Chatham–Kent–Essex and Prince Edward–Hastings for all their comments today. I appreciate that.

What I’ve got coming from the government side is that if you say enough misinformation enough times, you might think it might become truth. I’d like to point out that they keep taking sections of the Ontario Supreme Court recommendations or—

Interjection: Ruling.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Ruling, thank you. But there have actually been three or four cases out there that say we can implement a mandatory wage freeze. As Christine Elliott, from Whitby–Oshawa, said today, the courts cannot close their eyes to the periodic occurrence of financial emergencies when measures must be taken to juggle priorities to see a government through a crisis.

“While the courts have recognized that substantial fiscal emergencies are cause for infringing on section 2(d) of the charter, three criteria must be met....” The criteria:

“(1) The circumstances must be pressing and substantial.” I think that facing a \$30-billion deficit and \$400-billion debt considers this pressing and substantial.

“(2) The measures adopted must be carefully designed to meet the objective.” This measure does: \$2 billion savings a year heading towards balancing our budget.

“(3) The constitutional impairment must be modest—or as minimal—as it can reasonably be.” The teachers’ unions and the doctors have said that two years is fair. That’s all this bill calls upon: for everybody across the board to be fair to Ontarians. We each take a little bit of hurt due to this mismanagement from this government, and fairly, across the board. Two years: We have a little bit of hardship, but for the future of Ontario, it is better.

I appreciate you listening to my speech today. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. We’ll take the vote on this at the end of regular business.

PESTICIDES AMENDMENT ACT
(LICENCE FOR COSMETIC
PURPOSES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES PESTICIDES
(LICENCE À DES FINS ESTHÉTIQUES)

Mr. Chudleigh moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 88, An Act to amend the Pesticides Act to provide for the use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes with a licence / Projet de loi 88, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les pesticides afin de prévoir l’utilisation de pesticides à des fins esthétiques en vertu d’une licence.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation. Mr. Chudleigh.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Welcome to Ontario. Welcome to Ontario, the province of dandelions, the province of the ragweed, the province of hay fever and allergy sufferers. Welcome to Ontario.

Bill 88, the Pesticides Amendment Act, amends the Pesticides Act to allow trained, licensed applicators to apply pesticides currently banned under section 7.1 of the Pesticides Act.

The Pesticides Act currently allows agriculture, forestry, golf courses, and public health and safety to use pesticides that are banned under section 7.1 of the Pesticides Act. Bill 88 will allow trained and licensed applicators to apply pesticides at safe levels as approved by Health Canada via the Pest Management Regulatory Agency.

The issue of safety is one everyone is concerned about, and I appreciate that concern; believe me, I understand it. As we look around at our very complex world, we see things that might harm others, that might harm our loved ones, that might harm ourselves. I’ll just use a couple of examples. Sugar, something that’s found in every home, properly used in coffee, ice cream, cake, icing—what’s a birthday party without sugar? A tablespoon here, a teaspoon there; it’s an excellent product. But are you aware that if you consume a cup of sugar in

one sitting that it would kill you? You would literally burn yourself to death with excess energy. Used improperly, sugar is a very dangerous product, but used properly it gives a taste that many people like—some of us too much.

Benzoate of soda: It’s found naturally in fruit, such as cranberries, and is used as a food preservative common in ketchup and other room-temperature-stable products. At a level of one tenth of 1%, it is a good, safe, effective preserver of food. At higher quantities, over 1%, it turns into a deadly poison. Again, used properly, benzoate is a safe, effective food preservative; used improperly, it’s a dangerous poison.

Pesticides can fall under these same parameters. Weed killer, for instance, may require 50 millilitres of product to be mixed with four litres of water. Now, 50 millilitres is a very small amount. It barely covers the bottom of a Tim Hortons coffee cup. It’s rather hard to measure. Human nature might say that if a little is good, more is better. When dealing with pesticides—or sugar, or benzoate of soda—this is not true. If you’re measuring pesticides by the plug—one plug, two plugs—you’re doing it wrong.

A licensed applicator has the proper equipment to mix the product at the approved rates for safe application. That is why Bill 88 puts pesticides in the hands of trained applicators to ensure pesticides are applied at safe, appropriate rates—rates that have been tested and approved by Health Canada and regulated by the Pest Management Regulatory Agency.

Many people have told me that they’re concerned, when walking on a spring evening in their neighbourhood, that they can smell weed killer that has been applied to a lawn. Well, indeed, they should be concerned. If you can smell it at a distance, it has been applied at much too high a rate; 10 times the safe level by home gardeners is not unusual. That is why it should be put in the hands of only licensed applicators.

A number of studies have been done dealing with residue levels of pesticides in lakes and streams in Ontario. Keep in mind, homeowners’ use of pesticides amounts to less than 5% of the total amount used; farms, forestry and golf courses, all exempt from section 7.1 of the Pesticides Act, use the rest. An example of an MOE—Ministry of the Environment—study that was done to measure residue levels found that residue levels in urban waterways were higher than in rural streams. Yet the vast majority of pesticides are applied in rural areas. Again, I point out the use of pesticides in rural parts of Ontario, where the vast majority are applied by licensed, trained applicators, don’t produce high residue rates because they are properly applied.

In an MOE baseline study, the Humber River was tested in an area where a golf course was on both sides of the river. A sample was taken upstream of the golf course and a second sample was taken downstream of the golf course. The samples were taken after a significant rainfall event. This rainfall would ensure that some erosion or drainage from the surrounding land would wash into the

stream. One would expect the downstream sample would have a higher residue level because of the runoff from the golf course, which is a legal user of pesticides. That is not the case. In fact, the upstream sample had significantly higher residue levels than the downstream sample. Only one reason could explain these results: The upstream sample measured residue from residential application done by homeowners. The sample taken downstream from the golf course measured the residue from the golf course, which was applied by trained applicators using appropriate rates of application as approved by Health Canada. Homeowners did not; they overdosed their lawns, causing excessive product to be washed into the stream.

Another type of example: Acelethyon is an active ingredient found in products that kill dog and cat fleas. In these products, Acelethyon is present at about 18% by volume. It is also an active ingredient in a product called Merit, which gardeners use to treat grubs in lawns. In Merit, it is present at about one half of 1%. Fleas, 18%; grubs, one half of 1%. The dog or cat that has been treated is in the house playing with your children, yet Merit at one half of 1% is banned. It just doesn't make any sense.

1430

The ban of pesticides in Ontario is not working, and their inappropriate application is dangerous and harmful to the environment. Via the Internet, Ontarians can order banned products from Saskatchewan or other places in Canada that allow these pesticides and have them delivered to their homes in a matter of a few days. They can get pesticides in the United States by simply driving across the border. In other words, there's no shortage of pesticides if you really want to have them. These products are generally applied improperly by homeowners at rates that far exceed the recommended safe rates approved by Health Canada.

My bill places pesticides in the hands of trained, responsible applicators. These applicators will ensure the pesticides will be applied in a responsible manner, properly posted and in compliance with regulations, tested and developed by Health Canada and the Pest Management Regulatory Agency. These pesticides are registered for use only after a stringent science-based evaluation that proves the safety of the product if used as directed.

During committee hearings of Bill 64, Lindsay Hanson of the Pest Management Regulatory Agency noted, "Health Canada's priorities are the health and safety of Canadians and their food supply. This primary mandate is applied when approving pesticides for use in Canada. The primary objective under the Pest Control Products Act is to prevent unacceptable risk to people and the environment from the use of pest control products. We also enable users to access pest management tools, namely, those pest control products and sustainable pest management strategies."

He went on to say, "Under the federal responsibilities, we regulate all pest control products imported into, sold

or used in Canada under the Pest Control Products Act. This includes the pre-market review, which is the scientific assessment that we do; post-registration compliance and monitoring; and the re-evaluation process, which is a scientific assessment every 15 years" of existing products.

"The pre-market assessment is an area that includes over 200 studies that are required to register a new product in Canada" and can cost upwards of tens of millions of dollars. "The particular areas we examine look at health assessment, those being the toxicological evaluation; the occupational and bystander exposure assessments; and food residue and exposure assessments."

"We also do similar work under the environmental assessment banner, in terms of looking at the environmental toxicology and the environmental chemistry and fate. We also look at the value assessment, efficacy, competitiveness and sustainability of the use of that product."

"There is a strong reliance on a comprehensive body of scientific evidence and scientific methods. It reflects approaches of other regulatory bodies around the world. It's a systematic application of science to support regulatory decisions. We have a large number of in-house qualified scientists with a wide range of expertise." Mr. Hanson works "with approximately 350 scientists back in Ottawa. The entire agency has a staff of about 500 people."

"The data requirements to register a product in Canada are extensive. These are the scientific studies that are required in order to assess hazards and risks to health and the environment. These are conducted according to OECD guidelines for study protocols."

He concluded, "Health Canada is confident that the pesticides approved for use in Canada, including lawn and garden products, can be used safely when label directions are followed."

In BC just this month, an all-party committee rejected an outright ban, saying the scientific evidence doesn't support such a move.

This list of organizations—including the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, Canadian Environmental Law Association, Ecojustice, Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, Ontario College of Family Physicians, Ontario Medical Association pediatric section, Pesticide Free Ontario, Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario and the Toronto Environmental Alliance—are all opposed to Bill 88. I say to them all, if you have scientific evidence that any approved pesticide is harmful if applied according to the instructions, get that evidence to Health Canada, and the product will be removed from use immediately. All the organizations know this, yet none of them have done it. My point is, inappropriate use and application is a dangerous thing, and it is ongoing, and is going to continue to be ongoing in Ontario.

A ban is not working to protect our environment. Pesticides must be put into the hands of licensed, trained applicators for their safe application. This bill will make for a safer Ontario with greatly reduced risk of residue

buildup in our soils, our lakes and our streams. I urge all members of the House to vote in favour of this bill to protect our environment and our future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Davenport.

Mr. Jonah Schein: As always, it's my pleasure and honour to rise on behalf of the people of Davenport and the great city of Toronto. However, it's with some discouragement that I find myself spending my afternoon talking about this issue, because this feels like moving backward, not moving forward.

I want to talk to the young people up in the balcony here today, because I think young people understand this.

Interjection.

Mr. Jonah Schein: Lots and lots. Young people understand the future.

Did you know that "progressive" actually means "moving forward"? What we have here is something that really moves us backward. So we're actually doing much better on pesticide use in Ontario. We don't have as much pesticide use, and it means that people are much healthier. The argument people are having here today is basically whether you should have a perfectly green lawn but you might get sick or you might get asthma, or is it okay to have a dandelion in your lawn but be healthier? That's sort of what we're debating here.

I think the disappointing thing is that I come into this House to represent the people of Davenport because we have real, real concerns in our community and across this province. We know—we all agree—that we need to get this province working again. We need to be talking about jobs. We need supports for people who are struggling. We need child care. We need all these things. Instead we're talking about something that takes us backward here.

To talk a little bit more about Bill 88, what this bill does, which I cannot support, is that Bill 88 seeks to reverse the ban on cosmetic use of pesticides. Bill 88 would destroy Ontario's cosmetic pesticide ban by allowing non-essential pesticide use to return to the province. In fact, Ontario's pesticide ban is currently the most health-protective legislation of its kind in North America, and we all know that our health is priceless. It's the one thing we cannot sacrifice, and that's exactly what allowing more pesticide use in our cities and our communities will do. It has already helped us to substantially reduce pesticide concentrations in urban streams, because the pesticides we put on our lawn go into our sewers, go into our water, end up in our water system and then we have to drink those chemicals and we don't want to do that.

The provisions in this bill: Bill 88 introduces an amendment to section 7.1 of the Pesticides Act, 2009, to exempt people from the ban on cosmetic pesticide use when contracting with a licensed company. It does not affect the current exemptions for golf courses, for farms and for forest companies. Those folks already have an exemption. You can have pesticide use where appropriate, but just cosmetic use, to make something a little

bit prettier on a front lawn, is what we're talking about here.

We know that each month more scientific research comes out connecting pesticide exposure to human illness. Just this spring the Ontario College of Family Physicians, representing over 10,000 doctors, released a new study showing pesticide exposure is linked to birth defects, reduced IQ and childhood asthma. The review, released in May, reconfirms that pesticides are of course harmful to reproductive and respiratory systems and to the neuro-development of behaviour—that means brain development. Earlier science showed that people exposed to these chemicals are at greater risk for neurological illness and for cancer. This hardly seems worth it to me.

I can't wait till you guys turn 18 and can vote and you bring just some reasonableness back to this province, because we desperately need it. We desperately need a reasonable conversation. Adults in this province need to know what's really important, and I'm counting on you guys to grow up fast and to have a say here.

The science was strong when the ban was passed in 2008, and we keep on researching it and we know it's stronger today. All the science shows that this is hazardous. The landmark Supreme Court of Canada ruling on *Spraytech v. Hudson* in Quebec in 2001 upheld the concept of governments being able to apply precautionary principles as trustees of the environment. That's our job when we're here in the Legislature. We're supposed to protect Ontarians. We're supposed to make sure that people's health is protected. We're supposed to make sure that the environment is protected, and across the country, Canadians living in communities with pesticides bans have healthy, chemical-free lawns and gardens that are as beautiful as ever.

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Since this legislation came into effect in 2009, it's working. Concentrations in urban streams of lawn chemicals such as 2,4-D and Dicamba and MCPP have been reduced by 97%; they're almost all gone. Numerous respected health and environmental organizations—actually, you mentioned some of them—such as the Canadian Cancer Society, the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, the Ontario College of Family Physicians, they've all stated their support for the current Pesticides Act and their opposition to this bill, to Bill 88, or other attempts to weaken the act.

What we see here, whether it's the Conservatives over here or the government, is actually weakening of environmental laws across this province. It's deregulating. It's taking control out of the hands of government and people and saying that one person can put pesticides, they can hunt endangered species, they can do any of those things, and the rest of us have no control over that. That's what government's role is, right? Government's role is to act on all of our behalf and make sure that we keep things fair, we keep things healthy, we keep the environment healthy.

All of us—you know, very smart people get elected here in this Legislature, but not all of us are doctors. But

when we're talking about health, we should listen to the doctors.

Interjection.

Mr. Jonah Schein: My friend here has a Ph.D. but he's not a medical doctor, I don't think.

So what do the doctors say about this? There's a group called the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment and they say, "Our doctors are appalled at Bill 88's proposal to weaken the most health-protective pesticide legislation in North America. Ontario's Cosmetic Pesticides Ban Act in 2008 was based on a solid body of scientific data detailing the health impacts of pesticides, but today we know even more. The latest science from the Ontario College of Family Physicians links pesticide exposure to low birth weight, behavioural problems, lowered IQ, and lung disease. If any amount of spraying is permitted, it will risk the health of ... Ontarians"—if any amount is permitted, it will risk the health of Ontarians.

This is why we do science in school, right? We need scientists. We need doctors to make sure that we're doing things in the best interests of the people of Ontario. They're saying that this is going to make people sick and we need to listen to them.

All of us want to make sure that we're using our tax dollars wisely, and we know that one of the most growing budget lines is always paying for health costs. Now, you guys would agree that it makes sense to stop people from getting sick in the first place rather than treating the disease later, right? So that's what I think we should be doing. And if we know we can stop people from getting sick by not dumping chemicals on our front lawns, we should do that, right? It costs money, but also it's terribly sad when somebody in our family gets sick, when they get cancer; as kids, when you have asthma and you can't play sports, it's terribly sad. It's something we can avoid, but we need adults in this province to act responsibly here.

This is what the Canadian Cancer Society says. The Canadian Cancer Society—we've spent millions and millions and billions of dollars on cancer research, trying to make people better when they get cancer. We could spend almost no money just to help not as many people get cancer, to stop people from getting cancer in the first place. The Ontario Cosmetic Pesticides Ban Act—this is what the Canadian Cancer Society says: "The Ontario Cosmetic Pesticides Ban Act is a significant way of engaging in the fight against cancer and we support it in its current form. Because of the act, parents no longer worry about their children being exposed to cosmetic pesticides while playing in backyards, parks and school yards. We need to remember that the body of evidence suggests a positive association between exposure to certain pesticides and cancer. The act has been successful." So let's leave it. This is what the cancer society says.

In my riding, in my community in Toronto, we don't have so much green space. Some of you folks are lucky; you live in the country and you've got lots of green space

to go for a walk or a bike ride. In my community in Davenport, we have a few parks and they're great, and everybody in my riding goes out and plays in them, but nobody's going to want to play baseball or soccer, nobody's going to want to run around, nobody's going to want to go cycling or play tag if when you're doing that you're getting sick because you're breathing in all these pesticides. The people who use Dufferin Grove Park in my riding or Earlscourt Park or Dovercourt Park or folks who just want to walk their dogs, they all deserve to have safe, healthy parks to play and exercise in.

The sad thing is that we're actually using valuable time here in this Legislature to debate something that I thought we had settled a long time ago. In fact, we're going backwards here. We're going back in time, and it's not a good thing.

This is what the Canadian Environmental Law Association says: "Ontario's approach to banning the cosmetic use of pesticides is the culmination of over 20 years of effort that began with local pesticide bylaws that withstood multiple legal challenges up to and including the Supreme Court of Canada. That court noted approval of the concepts of governments as 'trustees of the environment' and applying the precautionary principle. Given the multiple challenges we face of ongoing pollution emissions, and a wide range of toxic substances in our air, food, water and in multiple consumer products, we should take every opportunity to minimize or eliminate exposures to toxic substances that are unnecessary and easily eliminated. The cosmetic use of pesticides falls squarely into this category and banning the use and sale of needless pesticides is an exemplary way to apply a precautionary approach."

This is not a controversial thing. In fact, 70% of Ontarians support the existing ban on pesticides that we have. So this is representing a very, very small group of people, and once you folks get older and are part of this overwhelming majority in support of banning pesticides, there will be fewer people who would support this bill.

From an economic standpoint as well, when you talk to folks who are trying to invest in green technology, the one thing that they say is that they're okay with regulations as long as they can count on what's happening. If they know that they need to be able to support gardeners in ways that don't make people sick, they're cool with that. They'll do that. They'll work towards making healthier ways to support plant life. But they don't like it when things get changed around. So this messes up an entire industry when you start changing the regulations.

Most of all, I'm hoping that we'll have the support of the government on this. I'm listening right now; my phone is ringing off the hook from the environmental community, which is just distraught with what the government is doing in this budget bill. I urge the backbench on the government side to look at what's happening in the budget bill. It's absolutely gutting all the environmental regulations we have in this province. It goes absolutely against the Environmental Bill of Rights. You need to go to bed feeling good about yourself, and you

can't do it if you know what the budget bill is doing to the environment in this province.

Thanks, folks out there, for coming out today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Mr. Speaker, it's my opinion that Bill 88 should be called the Neanderthals Use More Pesticides Act. Trust the Conservatives to take a step backwards when it comes to protecting the environment and our children.

Let's start off with the Conservatives getting rid of the National Round Table on the environment and the economy. This was done in the federal budget recently. It was a great organization that was recommending to Canada what they should do. These were all appointees of Mr. Harper. They were telling the truth about the environment, climate change, what's happening with the CO₂ going into the air. They were telling the truth, so he got rid of it. These were his appointees. I think that's where the Conservatives come from on most of these environmental things that have taken so long—20 years. I worked on this in 2001 and 2002 in Ottawa. We lost banning the cosmetic use of pesticides then. We were beaten back, but we had all the doctors from CHEO on our side, and they were saying we must go ahead with this. No, the pushers of these pesticides were able to convince the council. We got a compromise bylaw that didn't work, and so we're here today. So this follows the federal Conservatives' line: increase greenhouse gases, destroy the Fisheries Act, fire the scientists and push dirty coal. This bill wants to take us backwards relative to protecting our environment and our children.

We heard that it doesn't work. Well, it does work: a 90% reduction in these terrible chemicals in our urban streams. That's how effective it is. So there are grubs, so there are difficulties making that lawn look great. But what about our children? That's where our arguments have to be coming from.

Let's not forget that cigarette research paid for by the tobacco companies once proved there was no connection between smoking and cancer, and this deadly opinion continued for 50 years. That's what this is about.

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The science is there. Here's what a few organizations have said about pesticides.

"The Ontario College of Family Physicians solidly supports a province-wide ban on the use of cosmetic pesticides. Our research demonstrates the many health effects associated with pesticides. On behalf of our most vulnerable patients, the children of this province, we are pleased to hear that the government has moved so quickly to develop this important legislation." And it has worked. It has worked. So many people put so much effort into protecting our children. That was Jan Kasper-ski, chief executive officer, Ontario College of Family Physicians.

"The Ontario Public Health Association is pleased to see a ban on the use and sale of pesticides for cosmetic purposes. This enabling legislation is another positive

step the McGuinty government is taking to protect the health of our children and our environment." That was Connie Uetrecht, executive director of the Ontario Public Health Association.

This is what these people said when this legislation was proposed, and it's great legislation.

In order to protect Ontario families and improve our environment, this government brought in the cosmetic pesticides ban. The ban, which came into effect on April 22, 2009, reduces the unnecessary risks of pesticides used for cosmetic purposes. It's one of the toughest cosmetic pesticide bans in the world, and it is working.

So now we have a member who brings in this neanderthal bill, Bill 88. I'm surprised it is not a bill to bring back smoking on airplanes. It's about the same level of effort. I wonder how many of you have been in the children's cancer clinics. I attended many cancer clinics over three years, about 40 years ago. Those CHEO doctors wanted us to get rid of these chemicals then, and they want us to keep that ban in effect now. Just go into those oncology clinics and see the kids.

When I was elected to Ottawa's council in 2000, plans were under way to bring in this ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides. As I said, we lost it. We lost that vote. There was too much pressure from big chemicals, and we got a compromised bill that didn't work. This provincial bill is working. It's a great bill, and it shouldn't be played with.

Cosmetic pesticides are chemical or biological sprays, liquids, powders or substances combined with chemical fertilizers used to destroy living things such as insects, plants and fungi for the purpose of enhancing the aesthetics of an area.

Pesticides can enter the body through skin contact, by ingestion or by breathing them in, and can enter the home through people, pets, objects and toys contaminated with chemicals.

The really important thing that I saw with this was—this is back in the 1990s. When they'd come to spray your lawn, they'd say, "Okay, put the dog in the garage. Keep him there all day." That was the type of thing that was happening in our province. We got beautiful grass, but what was happening with the kids who played on those lawns?

In the short term, people with lung diseases who are sensitive to chemicals are the most affected and can have an immediate physical reaction, such as an asthma attack. Exposure may lead to fertility problems in both men and women, and exposure in women during pregnancy can lead to early pregnancy loss, birth defects and altered fetal growth.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer and the US National Toxicology Program state that some pesticides and the by-products of the use of pesticides, such as chlordendic acid, can cause cancer. So it's that thing—it can cause cancer. The research has not tied a great deal of this stuff in, but just because that possibility is there, and it's a big possibility, and there are relationships that have to be dealt with, we have to have that precautionary principle and say, "Yes, ban it."

Long-term health effects of chronic exposure in infancy may include cancer, damage to the central nervous system, respiratory illnesses and damage to the immune system.

When it comes to the environment, pesticides have been identified as a potential cause of amphibian declines and deformities such as missing or additional body parts. Two independent studies completed by British and French researchers found that some pesticides could be behind the worldwide decline of honeybees and bumblebees.

But sadly, Bill 88 is expected of the Conservative Party. Whether it's banning smoking in cars with children, whether it's opening new coal plants out west, whether it's about green energy, Conservatives can be counted on in doing the wrong thing for the environment.

I have a few pages left here, but I just wanted to end up and leave some time for my friend.

So now we have this member introducing a bill that wants to go backwards on very important legislation that's doing its job to protect the health and environment of Ontarians. This bill is wrong. Anyone with children or grandchildren—vote against it. Vote for the health of your children and not for that perfect lawn. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'm pleased to support the bill. I worked extensively on the pesticides file, back during the Bill 64 fiasco.

Here we are a few years out, and people are coming back from Buffalo or Quebec with a stockpile of spray. Now we're seeing people, just like the old days, back to spraying burdock with diesel. I understand that people boil rhubarb juice to kill spiders. I don't know how that works out. Vacant lots are overrun with weeds. We heard reference to an attack—the allergy issues, again, are clearly related to a lot of the weeds that were mentioned earlier by the sponsor of this bill.

You may think this bill is about cosmetics and aesthetics, and you're wrong. This is a policy and legislation based on emotion rather than science.

For the past number of years, we've been questioning why the government would wade into a matter that's already managed by the federal government. The federal Pest Control Products Act controls the sale and use of products in Canada. The Food and Drugs Act allows for the setting of maximum limits for residue in food. The Environmental Protection Act includes numerous provisions to protect the environment and human health from pesticides. The Fertilizers Act requires registration of fertilizer-pesticide mixtures; and the Feeds Act with respect to contamination of livestock feed. And in Ontario, when this bill was introduced we had the Ontario Pesticides Act, the Municipal Act, the weeds act and the forest sustainability act. Mr. McGuinty ignored his own Pesticides Advisory Committee when this legislation was first brought in.

We're paying for it. We're paying for it as taxpayers—the duplication, provincial and federal dupli-

cation, and the squabbling. Never did this government consult with PMRA, the federal Pest Management Regulatory Agency. They waded in with a ban, suggesting there's something inherently wrong with the plethora of insecticides, herbicides, algacides, fungicides, and rodenticides, products that are used by those of us who own farmland. There was a lot wrong with Bill 64, and it all was driven by the fact that it didn't even come close to anything at all with respect to a consensus with respect to the neutral, objective research and science that was present.

When you have legislation that's anti-science and anti-innovation, it really puts the development of future products in a tough way. What company is going to invest the time and money to stay on top of new infestations, new diseases? Why jeopardize millions of dollars?

Grubs are taking over Ontario—I'm not referring to anybody in this Legislature. The Minister of the Environment knows about this infestation. He's looking for a miracle product to get rid of them. You cannot have it both ways.

So it came in, with virtually no consultation, and no one willing to review the regulation. I'm very concerned about the path we're now on. For that reason, I support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. This is a great opportunity for me to speak about a very important bill—not this particular bill, not Bill 88, but the bill it's trying to amend. It's not going to come as a surprise to any members who have heard my views about environmental issues that I will not be supporting Bill 88.

I will tell you a very precise reason for me not supporting: because my community does not support Bill 88. The member from Ottawa-Orléans very clearly articulated the work that has been done in Ottawa, in our community, in terms of having a ban on cosmetic use of pesticides.

Our city council had tried at times before in the past and they were not successful. The community was outraged. The community wanted to ensure that we protect the health and safety of our children, that we ensure that we do not spray our lawns with harmful chemicals just because we want them to look pretty.

1500

In the 2007 campaign, when I ran for the first time to be a member of this Legislature, that was one of the key issues that was raised again and again from my constituents: They wanted a ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides. In fact, some of the neighbourhoods in my community, in my riding, and particularly in Glebe, brought in a voluntary ban as a community association. I salute them for that, because they showed strong leadership in getting that message across.

Now we've got this ban across the province since 2009. It's the right direction. We are making sure that we are not putting chemicals in our water streams, that we are cleaning up.

I'm not surprised that the member from Halton has brought in this amendment to the ban. His party supports it because they did not support the ban in the first place.

I'm really heartened to hear the arguments that were presented by the member from Davenport. I'm glad to see that his party's position, hopefully, has changed on this issue, because back in 2009, his party voted against this ban as well, which surprised me and many across the province: that the NDP, who champions environmental issues, were not in support of this. But I'm glad to see that they see that this is a strong ban, that this is a ban in the right direction, because it ensures that our communities, our neighbourhoods, where our children play—that we are not spraying chemicals on our front lawns.

I've never used pesticides. I've got a fairly big front yard and a backyard where I live in Ottawa. I've never used pesticides because I've never understood why somebody would want to do that. I think the member from Ottawa—Orléans raised a very good example. When you're warning, "Oh, don't put your dogs away in the garage," obviously, there's something wrong with the product. That's why you're trying to do it at all. When you put those little stickers saying, "Don't walk on the grass for another 24 hours because it has been sprayed by pesticide," obviously there are some harmful effects to it. That's why you're preventing people from crossing on it. Why would you then want to use it?

Cut your grass often. It's good exercise. You are out in the outdoors, getting some sun and getting some fresh air. These things are unnecessary. I think, in many ways, we've used it in the past because there's a certain life-style, as North Americans, we've gotten accustomed to. Some aspects, I think, we can live without.

I think the ban was a step in the right direction, the same thing as our efforts around conservation of electricity; the same thing as our efforts around conservation of water. These are simple things that we can do to ensure that we are helping to clean up our environment. These are simple things that we can do to ensure that we are leaving a brighter future, a healthier future, for our children.

If you speak to experts—the member from Davenport quoted some. I would like to quote Jan Kasperski, who is the chief executive officer of the Ontario College of Family Physicians. This is what she said: "The Ontario College of Family Physicians solidly supports a province-wide ban on the use of cosmetic pesticides. Our research demonstrates the many health effects associated with pesticides. On behalf of our most vulnerable patients, the children of this province, we are pleased to hear that government has moved so quickly to develop this important legislation."

The same thing from Connie Uetrecht, who is the executive director of the Ontario Public Health Association: "The Ontario Public Health Association is pleased to see a ban on the use and sale of pesticides for cosmetic purposes."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Todd Smith: I'm glad to participate in the debate on Bill 88 today, brought forward by my colleague from Halton. I thought he was fairly eloquent in the way he brought it forward and the fact that there hasn't been the science needed to bring in the initial bill when it was brought in by this government.

We do have a couple of people here from Prince Edward county that I wanted to introduce, from my riding. Reg and Paula Kelly are here from the Weed Man and Atlantis Irrigation. I was a little worried about the member from Davenport sitting so close to them while he was bringing his remarks here this afternoon.

One of the funny things that the member from Davenport said was that we should be debating jobs in the province of Ontario as well. The interesting connection is the fact that this bill has eliminated hundreds and probably thousands of jobs in the province of Ontario.

I can tell you, my friends the Kellys from Prince Edward county had three full-time staff. They were a growing business. They were looking to expand to four or five full-time staff. And now they have one full-time and one part-time staff at their business. They had 450 customers when they started out who required weed control. That's now down to 175.

The thing is that this bill hasn't eliminated harmful cosmetic pesticides from coming into the province. As the member from Halton and the member from Haldimand—Norfolk explained, they're coming in in the trunks of cars and in the backs of pickup trucks from neighbouring jurisdictions, whether it be the United States or other provinces, where Health Canada already has rules in place.

It only makes sense to me—and it was a very thoughtful presentation by the member from Halton—that licensed technicians be able to apply these pesticides in communities, because they are the ones who have been trained to do it properly. But in the meantime, this bill has allowed anyone who wants to go into Canadian Tire and get a bottle of Roundup to pour it on their lawn, and that's the dangerous part of this. We should let the licensed applicators, the licensed technicians—

Mr. Bob Delaney: They don't sell it anymore.

Mr. Todd Smith: Yes, they do sell it at Canadian Tire, my friend; they do in this province.

There used to be competition in this industry, and it seems now the only competition in this industry is the homeowner who is bringing the pesticides in.

So I support my friend from Halton for Bill 88. Not only is it having an impact on people's lawns, but it's having an impact on people's businesses as well. It's reducing the number of jobs in the province of Ontario and, as the small business critic for the PC Party, I think that's a problem.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure, again, to rise today in support of the legislation brought forward by my colleague from Halton and in support of the businesses in my community.

I was speaking with one of the business owners, a Mr. Al Pinsonneault, the proprietor of Al's Lawn Care in Chatham-Kent. Al told me very simply that there is a problem with the management of pesticide use in Ontario. He told me that his colleagues in the lawn care industry, some as far as Windsor, were facing bankruptcy following the 2008 pesticide ban. Despite having trained and licensed technicians on staff, men and women who were the experts in the handling of these materials, it wasn't good enough for this government, despite the fact that it was this government that licensed them in the first place.

On the other hand, by supporting this legislation, we could give our small businesses a valuable hand up instead of throwing handouts at them.

Al told me that if he were able to use these technologies once more, he could double or even triple his business by tackling common weeds like broadleaf, clover, dandelion, crab grass and even creeping Charlie. As it stands, replacement pesticides are far less effective than the real thing. Al told me while costs for the organic material are triple that of the original, they are up as high as 75% less effective. Materials like acetic acid and corn gluten meal have to be used in much larger amounts if they have any chance of being effective.

Speaker, I think it's clear from Al's story and from the support we've seen on this side of the House, that Bill 88 addresses a glaring hole in Ontario's management of pesticide use. Further to that, it undermines the hard work that has been done by Health Canada and the federal government through the Pest Management Regulatory Agency. This agency has done the legwork, put in the hours and come to us to say that these products are perfectly safe if handled properly, and there are safeguards.

Anybody who has ever worked for a golf course—where these original products are still being permitted, by the way—can tell you that professionals are more capable of handling these products with the utmost care. A series of studies and reports have been superseded by this government's agenda. That sounds somewhat familiar, if you ask me. But, you know what? We'll leave that subject to the Drummond report for another time.

Just think of the opportunities that will become available to small businesses like Al's Lawn Care. The range of services they'll be able to provide will grow, as well as their ability to deliver those services on time and within budget.

We need a science-based approach to a serious issue for homeowners and business. For that reason, I stand strong in supporting my colleague's Bill 88 with regard to pesticides.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

1510

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a real privilege today to stand and pay some respect to the comments made by the member from Halton, Mr. Chudleigh.

I want to start by saying that his long and distinguished association with rural Ontario, and agriculture

specifically, has to be part of understanding why he moved this. All it does is amend the previous bill—I think it was Bill 64—that was passed I believe in 2008. I looked up my notes from the past, and that bill was basically one page. In it, section 7.1 allowed the minister, by regulation, to ban or prohibit the use of certain agents. It also, in sections, exempted golf courses, agriculture and some other applications. But what he is saying, more specifically, is let's focus on urban gardeners and allow appropriate use of the appropriate products. I think he did allude in his remarks to a couple. Merit was one, and I heard recently that even Roundup Ready is in fact being used.

In my riding of Durham, much like Halton, agriculture is very important, and they do use, as scarcely as possible, products that allow us to grow high-quality food to feed Ontario. What he's putting in place is more appropriate measures to allow the appropriate product in the appropriate place, and in that respect, also banning—I think that's what he is implying in his summary statement; he'll probably refer to that—other products that aren't appropriate in the gardens of urban households.

He wants trained, licensed applicators. That's what they have in agriculture in Ontario. They have pesticide management advisers who tell them when it's appropriate to apply certain products to have optimum results for high-quality outcomes. In that respect, I think it's the right move at the right time for a bill that was like a broadaxe when in fact they should have been more specific about the appropriate products and how they should be used. I think he demonstrated that in his remarks.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Halton, you have two minutes for reply.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Thank you very much. I appreciate all the comments made, even though the member for Davenport, I think in a roundabout way, called me an old man. Perhaps I am older than you are, and a lot of that comes from experience, so I would listen to that. The member from Ottawa-Orléans didn't call me an old man; he called me neanderthal, and of course they died out thousands of years ago, so I'm really, really old.

But I don't take exception to that, because when people call you names it's because they don't have a very good argument, do they? These members came into this House with prepared statements and made their remarks. They didn't listen to my presentation.

This bill is about safety. Illegal pesticides are flying into this province, being used inappropriately. And as long as they're being used inappropriately, they're a threat, they're a danger to people walking past or walking through the grass or handling them improperly. They're a danger to the applicant as well. This bill is about regulating that. It's about making safe use of those chemicals, put in the hands of people who are licensed and trained and who know how to handle very dangerous chemicals.

Lord, I grew up on a farm. I've been associated with farmers all my life. I understand pesticides. I know they

are dangerous; you don't have to convince me they're dangerous. This bill is about safety, about applying these chemicals in a safe, appropriate manner.

I'll let you redeem yourselves by voting for this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We'll take the vote at the end of regular business.

CHILDREN'S LAW REFORM
AMENDMENT ACT (RELATIONSHIP
WITH GRANDPARENTS), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI
PORTANT RÉFORME DU DROIT
DE L'ENFANCE (RELATION
AVEC LES GRANDS-PARENTS)

Mr. Craitor moved second of the following bill:

Bill 67, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act with respect to the relationship between a child and the child's grandparents / Projet de loi 67, Loi modifiant la Loi portant réforme du droit de l'enfance en ce qui concerne la relation entre un enfant et ses grands-parents.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this bill. I rise today in the Legislature to talk about second reading of Bill 67. First, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank my co-sponsors of the bill, the member from Whitby—Oshawa and the member from Parkdale—High Park. Thank you very much.

I also want to recognize many of the grandparents who have travelled from across Ontario and are here in the gallery today. I thank you for taking the time to come and visit us at Queen's Park. I want to say to the grandparents that their support for this bill has been unwavering, and I thank them for taking the time to come here today. Some of them, in fact, have travelled a great distance.

I want to talk about the bill. The bill amends the Children's Law Reform Act to enable the formation and the continuation of personal relationships between children and their grandparents, something I think we just take for granted will always exist. It also sets out the needs and circumstances of a child that the court must consider in determining the best interest of the child. It adds to the list of needs and circumstances the emotional ties between a child and the child's grandparents and the willingness of each person applying for custody of the child to facilitate contact with the child's parents and grandparents.

It is far too often—and it's certainly far too often for me since I've been working on this bill for the last eight years—that a couple separates or gets a divorce and subsequently the relationship between the grandparent and the grandchild diminishes. In fact, sadly, Mr. Speaker, it may also be severed altogether as a result of extenuating circumstances or negative feelings as a result of the breakup.

I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, and everyone in the House and the people that are watching across Ontario, grandparents are more than just relatives. They can be the mainstay. They can provide the guidance and security that children lack sometimes at home with or without a parent. They can provide support. Grandparents provide stability. They provide a sense of self to children seeking love and understanding. Grandparents are in fact the heart and soul of grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, it is so sad to tell you that more than 75,000 Ontario grandparents are denied—that's just in Ontario—access to visiting with one or more of their grandchildren. Approximately 112,500 grandchildren in Ontario suffer from the known benefits of having a relationship between the grandchild and their grandparent. This can only damage future generations of our children.

I want to talk a bit about the background of the bill and why I have been so passionate about this bill, which is now numbered 67. When I was first elected as an MPP, one of the first groups that ever came in to see me in 2003 from my riding was a group of 12 grandparents. They came from Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Fort Erie. During my two-and-a-half-hour meeting with them, I realized the problems that these grandparents were facing when they tried to gain access or visitation rights or even, in one case, custody of their grandchildren. I was personally touched by their stories. Thanks to their help and the help from grandparents across Ontario, we sat down and felt the best way to bring attention to this growing problem was to bring forward a bill to this House. And I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, I introduced it as Bill 8, I reintroduced it as Bill 22, then I reintroduced it as Bill 33, and today I am hoping that this will be the last time that I ever have to introduce this bill again, that it will be passed, and it's now Bill 67.

I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, Bill 67 has been considered in its own form in Yukon and in six other provinces, including Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia concluded, like the current Ontario legislation, that there is nothing in the legislation now that prevented access and custody from a child by their grandparents, but they said that there was a real, practical need to put it into legislation now to highlight the benefits of maintaining positive relationships with grandparents where their lives have been disrupted.

I want to tell you some personal stories—and I have spoken with these people. I will tell you that in eight years, I have probably talked to 4,000 or 5,000 people, at a minimum, and I've heard some of the saddest stories that would—if I had the chance to share them with you for the next 30 hours, you would break down and cry when you hear what has happened to some of these grandparents and their children.

1520

As many members are aware, this is the fourth time, so I'm going to share a couple of stories, with their permission.

Jackie from Trenton sent me an email talking about the last time she saw her great-grandson: the summer of 2010. Imagine, we're entering the summer of 2012, and Jackie has not seen her great-grandson since the summer of 2010. He lost his mother to a violent murder when he was six months old. He lives only 30 minutes away from Jackie. She missed seeing so many firsts a baby goes through. She will shortly be 75 years old and cannot understand why it has been almost a year of fighting in the courts just to visit her grandson who lives half an hour away. There is something wrong with this picture.

Terri-Lynn is a grandparent who took her granddaughter's mother to court for access to her granddaughter. It took a year in the court, and she was granted two hours of access every other week. Her granddaughter's mother suddenly packed up and moved to Whitehorse. There was nothing Terri-Lynn could do. Her granddaughter's mother continues to move back and forth from Whitehorse. Terri-Lynn spoke to her lawyer and asked if there's anything, as a grandmother, that she could do. The lawyer said, "You'd have to go up to Whitehorse." That's financially impossible, so she doesn't see her grandchildren.

Finally, Donna from Grimsby told me about her experience with Madison, her first granddaughter, who was born in 2000. She was, in fact, in the delivery room to assist with Madison's birth and was allowed to cut the umbilical cord and was the first to hold Madison in her arms. Madison and her mom lived with Donna and her husband, Terry, for two and a half years. Her second granddaughter, Kaitlyne, was born in March 2005, and her grandson, Dylan, was born in 2011. Donna's daughter became angry with her mother and her husband and made it clear that she does not want them to see the grandchildren any more. So she has been fighting ever since to have access and the opportunity to see her grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, this is just a selection of the stories that I'm sharing with you.

I need to tell you there's huge support for this bill. Grandparents in this gallery have taken the time to show their support. I want to tell you that not only do I have support from each of the other two parties—and I thank them again for that—but I have support from the Canadian Association of Retired Persons; the Steelworkers union; the Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society; Cangrands kinship support, particularly from Betty Cornelius, who has been with me since the beginning of the time when we worked on this bill; the Canadian Auto Workers; and the list goes on. In addition, municipalities—towns and cities—in Ontario have passed resolutions endorsing this bill, from Mississauga to Waterloo to Owen Sound to North Kawartha to Rainy River to Kingston.

I want to conclude, Mr. Speaker, with a few closing comments. First, to my fellow colleagues who are here and those who are watching on TV, and to the guests: Not only is there widespread support for this bill, but the passage of Bill 67 is crucial to help families across

Ontario and to support the young lives of our children. Our children need and deserve to have family ties and bonds that grow stronger with them as they grow day by day. In fact, our children are our future, Ontario's future. We are investing in children, and we have invested in different ways, such as full-day kindergarten or children's mental health, and we must continue to invest in our children and our families by supporting this bill.

I believe families are the cornerstone and backbone of our society. We must ensure, particularly when a parental relationship breaks down, that the relationship between the grandparent and their grandchildren has to remain strong and continue to flourish. That's what Bill 67 will do.

I want to emphasize that the bill does not automatically give a grandparent the right. A grandparent will still have to make the application to the courts. But I do want to tell you that I have actually seen court cases where grandparents, under the existing legislation, went to the courts and the judge ruled that the grandparent had put together a very reasonable case and that it did make sense for them to have a relationship or the right to visit their grandchildren. But what the judge said was, "There's nothing in the current legislation that directs that I should do that, so I'm not going to give you that opportunity." I want to share that with you, because that's the importance of changing this legislation—why it has to be done.

Children need a bond between themselves and an adult. The mentorship is invaluable. The unconditional love and fulfilment ever after that a grandparent can provide to a grandchild is something that is priceless. So I'm pleased to stand here today and ask for support. You never like to presume in this place, but I am confident that the bill will pass second reading. The challenge is to get it into third and then get it passed. This will be the last time that I will stand up in this House, because I am confident that this bill is going to get royal assent at the end of this term, whenever it does occur.

I want to say thanks to everyone for having the opportunity to say a few words.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's again my pleasure to follow my colleagues from Whitby-Oshawa, Niagara Falls, Parkdale-High Park and others supporting Bill 67. I know that the member from Niagara Falls has been trying get this legislation passed for a number of years now, and waiting behind him have been legions of grandparents whose only hope is for a closer, more loving family.

There's an old cliché that once your children grow up, leave home and begin lives of their own, many parents look forward to the arrival of grandchildren. While we may chuckle at the notion that our grandkids are like a cheerier version of our own children, open to spoiling with gifts and treats yet without the 24/7 job of parenting, the truth is, it takes a lot of work, time and effort to be a loving grandparent. Yet it's a privilege that too many grandmothers and grandfathers go without in our society.

I know that if I couldn't see my two grandchildren, Calvin and Nathan Nicholls, I would be devastated.

What this bill accomplishes in addition to preventing unreasonable barriers to a grandparent's access to their grandchildren is a mandate for family courts to consider the emotional ties of a grandchild to his or her grandparents. This is crucial, and it's often overlooked as part of the conversation when we discuss grandparents' rights. Certainly, the emotional well-being of the grandparents in question is important, not to mention the strife that is introduced to their relationships with their own children when those barriers are thrown up. But we must always keep in mind the love that a grandchild would be missing from their lives—the imparting of guidance and wisdom, the family meals, the holidays that would be a little less bright, a little less whole.

When my esteemed colleague quotes statistics—nearly 75,000 grandparents have been denied access, or over 100,000 grandchildren cannot see Grandma and Grandpa—it begs us to find a solution. So I'm pleased to have a constituent of mine here today for whom this issue is deeply personal: Ms. Deanna Sherman.

The story of Deanna's family is like so many others. As her son and his partner went their separate ways, Deanna's access to her grandson was limited. An already emotional situation grew worse with each passing year.

The efforts of the grandparents in cases such as these are exceedingly difficult, and it's always a shock when it happens. Through the early years of her grandson's life, Deanna and her husband made every effort to be present for the wonderful little boy they loved. Yet as time dragged on and the family situation grew more volatile, it got to the point where they couldn't even bring their grandson to a Maple Leafs game as a Christmas present. Eventually, they were forced to cut off contact altogether. I ask: Where's the justice?

As emotional as these situations can get, we must remember that nobody wants them to escalate. Deanna has told me that she was unsure what to do for so long; that as much as she loved her grandson, she understood that she couldn't interfere with the rights of the parents. But what about the rights of the grandparents? Too often, family members experiencing these difficulties are labelled as unreasonable. But I don't believe that's the case. It's simply a sad situation that preys on our greatest fears: that our loved ones may be taken away.

I believe this bill hits the right marks. It gives our courts the power to consider the broader consequences in cases that are often fraught with destructive, immediate emotions. It protects the well-being of our children and the integrity of our families. For that reason, I applaud the sponsors of this bill and particularly the member from Niagara Falls. I support it wholeheartedly. Thank you.

1530

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure and a privilege to rise as one of those who co-authored this bill. I'm

honoured to have been asked to co-author this bill for the member from Niagara Falls.

Interruption.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: And that's one of the reasons we are doing it—that sound right up there. It's kind of sad that it's taken four tablings of this bill, and really, prior passages of this bill at second reading, to be able to get it in and out of committee. Now, in a minority government, it's our privilege as members of the New Democratic Party to support this bill and to assist the member to get it in and out.

The sad reality is that we are doing, I would hope, what his own cabinet that would do this time, so really a plea to his own cabinet they support their own member in getting this through so that finally it can become law. Four times is three times too many for this bill. Over those years, those sad stories that we've already heard are multiplied. That's what it means in this place: What it means in this place to do our jobs or not to do them is the impacts on real families and real people out there. When we hesitate to do what we need to do, when we agree and we know this is the right move forward and we don't move forward, people are hurt. It has real impact.

I want to reiterate, for all those watching at home, this is about the best interests of the child. This is not, in a kind of weird way, just about grandparents. I mean, it is about grandparents; it's about their rights. But ultimately what the grandparents and what we want in this House are the rights of the child. That's what we want—the rights of the child. That's what this is about.

I want to dedicate my comments to my own grandparent. Her name was Helen Wilson; she actually long since passed from this planet. Helen was a single parent in her own right, had four children—her husband left her back in the days when that was rare—raised them and then went on to raise us. Really, in a true way, my parents had a very dysfunctional marriage. It ended up driving me out of the house at an early age. But who was still there? It was my grandmother. It was my grandmother who looked after us, looked after me. It was upon her death that everything fell apart. It was upon her death that really I ended up being a street kid on the streets of Toronto for many years. It was because of that death. So I really want to dedicate these comments to her, because she is not alone in what she did. She is one of, we've just heard, thousands and thousands of grandparents across this province.

I want to acknowledge what grandparents do even where it's functional, even where grandparents have access to their grandchildren. Grandparents do the work, often, that this House doesn't. We lack quality child care in this province, and yet it's grandparents who pick up the slack for all of that. How many couples in my riding, in all of our ridings, have their children looked after by their grandparent because there are not a lot of other options? And by the way, that's the best. It's one of the best options to have the grandparents provide child care. They're providing child care. They're providing financial support to young families. How many families in our

ridings could afford to buy their first home were it not for the help of their grandparents? How many institutions in this province could function without the huge volume of volunteers, many of which are retired people? By the way, that pool will be shrinking as more and more of us become part of the freedom 95 group who have no pensions.

But suffice to say that now, grandparents not only look after grandchildren, and children, they also look after the institutions that make this province strong. All of that is done by our grandparents. If this bill does not pass—in the absence of this bill, what's happening is we are forcing these people, who contribute so much and have contributed so much for so long, to go to lawyers to actually get their just due. That's not what we want to do. People can usually ill afford it, forced into the courts just to be able to have access to their grandchildren.

I have a woman—and I want to tell a story as well. We all have them. Every MPP here has heard stories from their constituents, but hers is particularly moving. This is a woman who is now raising her grandchildren, just like my grandmother did with me, a woman who raised children from a very dysfunctional child of her own—a woman who wrestled with mental health and addiction issues and who fought her every step of the way. Clearly, it was in the best interests of the children not to be with their biological parents, in this instance. The grandmother stepped up here and tried to take them in.

The hurdles she had to try to help her own grandchildren were absolutely unconscionable. My constituency staff—and bless their cotton socks—did everything they could to help this woman, but ultimately, it was a matter before the courts. We all know that when it's a matter before the courts, there's very little, if anything, we as members of provincial Parliament can do to help our constituents. So all we were able to do was, really, just to sit back and watch in horror to see the trials she went through.

In this particular instance, it ended well. In this particular instance, after years of trying, she did finally get custody; she did finally get access. It all worked out. But during that time, these poor children, who could have been healthy, functioning children, developed all sorts of issues, as one can imagine, because the other aspect of this bill, what we're speaking about here today, is the toll it takes on the children while this kind of struggle is going on. Because if grandparents do not have rights to be able to have access to their children—and of course, it's not automatic, and the member pointed this out.

We also understand in this House that not all grandparents are wonderful. That has to be said on the record. Not all grandparent are wonderful. They have to make application, and it has to be overseen. But in this instance, the grandparents were wonderful. They were the best option for the children. This is many instances that we've all seen. The struggle and the time it took to gain access to their children and to gain, finally, custody of their grandchildren, meant harm to their grandchildren.

That's what it meant: It meant these children were harmed. It meant that these children did not have the life they deserved. The pain we felt in my constituency office, looking at the process for this one constituent to go through, was amplified 100 times in the pain she felt looking at what her grandchildren were going through.

It's been said that children are what you have so that you can have grandchildren. I'm not in that halcyon state yet. I have grown children, but I've got two marriages to go through—one hopes—and I've learned, like many people here who are in my position, not to speak about it, because, Lord knows, you don't want to speak about it to your children. You don't want to tell your children how wonderful it would be to have grandchildren, because then you almost guarantee you're never going to get them. So you learn to be strategic on this issue.

But having seen others, and there are many grandparents who sit as MPPs here, and having seen the joy that they get from their children and grandchildren—and let's face it, we know some of the reasons why. First of all, the second time around, you learn to do it better. When you're young parents, you don't have a lot of experience. Other reasons: The second time around, you have more time, sometimes more financial resources, and you can do it better. You also don't have to do it all the time. You also get to enjoy them and then send them home. I've had some experience of that with nieces and nephews but never with grandchildren, and I can only imagine what that experience is like.

But I also, if this bill doesn't pass, look into, as we all do, an uncertain future where that's concerned, because one can never predict what happens to their children. One can never predict that.

I'm getting very overt signals here that I am to leave time for someone, so I'm going to wrap up.

The critical issue here—and I'm going to reiterate it on behalf of the other author of this bill—is, number one, four times is three times too many.

1540

Number two, this bill has not only to pass this House this day but has to go to committee, get out of committee and come back to third reading. That's the difference. We ask the government to support us on this because I think on this side of the aisle we all do support us on that.

Thirdly, for all the grandparents who are here and all the grandparents out there who couldn't make it here who have gone through these struggles, our heartfelt condolences to you and our pledge that this time we'll get it right in this House.

Saying that, thank you, member from Niagara Falls; thank you to the grandparents who fought so hard; and best wishes to the grandchildren for a far, far better future than they've had to date.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'm pleased to speak this afternoon in favour of Bill 67, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act, and I'm pleased, again, to be in this House supporting my colleague for Niagara Falls and

my colleagues from Parkdale–High Park and Whitby–Oshawa.

I am glad to be speaking on this bill again. I spoke in favour of it in the past and I'm still supportive because I know that all children need stability. We know that children need feelings of self-worth and we know that those long-term relationships often come from a relationship with their grandparent.

We know that family law issues, particularly as they relate to custody of and access to children, can be particularly difficult. This is no less so when dealing with the issue of access by grandparents to their grandchildren. It's fortunate that in most cases, arrangements relating to the custody of and access to children, including access by grandparents, are often settled without recourse to litigation in the courts. The cases that do come before the courts, therefore, represent a very small percentage of the overall number of potential family law cases.

Historically, grandparents have had no legal rights of access to their grandchildren simply by virtue of their biological relationship. Legislation in all Canadian jurisdictions now makes it possible for grandparents to apply for custody of or access to their grandchildren. There's no jurisdiction in Canada, however, which provides grandparents access as a right, which is usually referred to as presumptive right of access.

There's no question that in most cases, the continuation of an existing grandparent-grandchild relationship is often in the best interests of a child. Similarly, relations between a child and other family members such as aunts and uncles, siblings, step-parents, step-grandparents and step-siblings can often be and are tremendously beneficial to a child's welfare and their development.

Grandparents are often a family's first reserve in a time of crisis. They act as playmates for their grandchildren, role models, family historians, and mentors, and they help lay a foundation for healthy self-esteem and security in children. They're really an important safety net.

We know that research suggests that grandparents play a significant role in the lives of children. In fact, ignoring the existence of a grandparent who has formed a strong bond with a child will not represent the best interests of that child.

My parents immigrated to Canada when I was three years old, and they left all of our extended family in Ireland and England. There were a couple of visits back and forth, but it wasn't as affordable as it is now. I didn't have the luxury of that Sunday night dinner to talk with my grandparents once a week or to pick up the phone; it was an expensive proposition. So for the most part, as a youngster, I got to know my grandparents through letters and audiotapes we used at the time and the packages that went back and forth at Christmastime. Although I didn't have their physical presence in my life until I was a teenager, I always felt that unconditional love and attention that all grandparents tend to shower on their grandchildren, and as an only grandchild, I was definitely spoiled in that respect.

I wish to recognize that special role that my maternal grandparents played in my life: Rose and Frank Gray. They were very simple individuals, but they found a way to make what I was doing as a teenager meaningful and special, and they helped me rear my own children. They gave advice that I think many of us rely on.

They're no longer in my life anymore, but I recognize how important that role is as I now approach that opportunity to become a grandparent myself before the end of the year. One of my children is finally going to make me a grandparent, so I know how valuable that resource is. I'm feeling that responsibility certainly coming forward and that untapped resource.

It's important to maintain those ties, and I wanted to be here to support my colleague from Niagara Falls and the members from Parkdale–High Park and Whitby–Oshawa in their attempts to bring this legislation forward. It's a good piece of legislation. I'm happy to support it. Thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Further debate.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: As a nana—and my hubby is a papa—it is a wonderful experience. I remember when my daughter—I was just turning 50—came to tell me that she and her husband were having our first grandchild. I kind of gasped a bit to think that I was going to be a grandmother, so I quickly took the name “Nana” so I didn't have to have the word “granny.” So I took that first. Anyhow, it's a wonderful opportunity, because you learn the most about yourself through your children and grandchildren. It is a wonderful experience.

I'm pleased to rise today to speak about Bill 67, and I commend the member from Niagara Falls for his dedication to this cause and his work pushing this legislation forward. It speaks volumes of your character, and I must say that I don't know you, but I would say that about you. This is, of course, the fourth time in the last seven years that this member has spoken to what is a very sensible, useful and humane bill, and the fifth time since 1995 that legislation of this kind has come before this House. Going over the history, I was struck by the fact that the last time it was debated, it appeared just before another marathoner, the condominium legislation introduced by the member from Trinity–Spadina. Hopefully this is a good omen and this bill will follow in its footsteps and be referred to committee in short order.

This is a bill that speaks to all Ontarians. There are studies upon studies and there are stacks of evidence that can tell you what you know in your heart—and hopefully from experience—to be true: namely, that the relationship between child and grandparent can be one of the most valuable bonds forged during the development years. That rare combination of life perspective and unconditional love can be very grounding but can also boost self-esteem and foster the confidence that young people need more than ever to tackle the demands of a world that is not always so nurturing. They offer the luxury of time and they offer often a neutral party at times when a father and mother may be at dramatic odds with each

other, as in a heated divorce. But mostly, this bill puts the child's interests front and centre and speaks to the power of family to transform those within it.

Certainly, as critic for children and youth services, I feel that sensible solutions that keep a child with family are always the best scenario. It strikes me as sad that we have to legislate something like equal access to family. Ontarians are living longer, more active and engaged lives, and it is fair to say that grandparents have never been better suited to fulfil the aims of custody or access cases and raise grandchildren as their own children in a place of love, encouragement, support and understanding. As a grandparent myself, as I said, I can't imagine being denied access to my darling grandson, Charlie.

This is a bill that deserves to go to committee. It deserves to hear input from a wide variety of stakeholders and for that input to be incorporated into legislation. We will naturally seek every assurance that the language of this bill is strengthened and that children's rights and needs are defended vigorously, but I am happy to support this bill and thankful for the opportunity to speak to it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. The member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Well, thank you very much, Speaker. It is a pleasure to stand in support of Bill 67, brought forth by, among others, my seatmate of eight and a half years, the member for Niagara Falls. I guess in this sense we've probably been joined at the elbows since our election. Like some members here, I voted for this bill four times, or I will have voted for it four times by the end of today, in its incarnations as Bills 8, 22, 33 and 67.

Today's grandparents are strong, and they're very healthy people. In fact, today's grandparents often look a lot more like their parents did of a generation ago. Our lifespans are longer. Today we look at the time in which we grew up, the era in which we grew up, and we think of the vigour with which we, who are the age of some of our grandparents—we've got a lot more vigour. We've just looked after ourselves. The quality of life is better. The modern medicine we have is better. Grandparents are simply better able to look after their grandchildren.

Bill 67 deals with some cases that many of us would rather not spend too much time thinking of: the breakup of a marriage, conflict within a family, the death or disability of one or both parents. Bill 67 deals with some of these often-tragic cases when the courts need to make an informed decision on who is going to assume custody of a child or of children. Bill 67 asks, when a court needs to consider the best interests of a child or children, that grandparents not be denied custody of the children nor be denied reasonable access to them.

1550

Now, I've had some representations from some of my friends who practise law and, in this case, family law. They've said, "Well, there may be a little bit more to it than that." And I said, "Yes, almost certainly there is, and that's why Legislatures have public hearings. But is there anything in Bill 67 or any of its predecessors that is a deal-breaker, that you absolutely can't live with, that you

can't sort out if you have a chance to have input via public hearings?" And all of them have said, "No. We can get this thing figured out." So let's get it figured out.

This bill asks courts to consider the interests of grandparents who are willing and able to assume custody of their grandchildren, should tragedy or other family circumstances strike their children's family. So let's look at why that would be a good idea.

Our government has ended mandatory retirement, and we recognize that we have a shortage of people in their child-rearing years. If you can't find them on the job, then how do you expect to find them in family settings, to be foster parents or guardians? It makes sense to say perhaps Grandma and Grandpa are as likely as any other to be good, fitting foster parents or to share some of the job of child-rearing. Not only have they done it, but they have the maturity and the perspective of experience and age to enable them to enjoy child-rearing in their mature years in a way they may not have done a generation earlier, when indeed it was their children.

Bill 67 says to the courts, "Don't dismiss the rights and willingness of grandparents to assist their grandchildren in child custody or access cases." I think it's a good bill. I support it, and I'm encouraging all members to support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Dufferin—Caledon.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon to comment on Bill 67, Children's Law Reform Amendment Act (Relationship with Grandparents). I've received correspondence on this issue many times from concerned grandparents who are saddened and frustrated that they've been restricted from seeing their own grandchildren. This is undoubtedly a very troubling situation, both for the grandparents and for the children. That is why Bill 67, which promotes the relationship between children and their grandparents, is important, particularly in situations where the child's parents have separated or divorced.

Bill 67 will amend the Children's Law Reform Act and prohibit the parents, or anyone else who is entitled to custody, from creating unreasonable barriers to the formation of a personal relationship between children and their grandparents. Bill 67 will also make courts consider a child's relationship with their grandparents in determining the best interests of the child.

By prohibiting parents or others with custody from actively preventing or impeding such relationships, the goal is to foster better relationships between children and grandparents. There is little doubt that many children have very special and important relationships with their grandparents. My own kids have learned so much from their grandparents, some of which I would not necessarily have taught as a parent, but nonetheless, I am grateful for what they have been offered.

It is for this reason I'm anxious to see Bill 67 head to committee so that these questions may be asked and addressed by interested grandparents, parents and other parties.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I'm glad to have one minute and 23 seconds to speak to this particular motion. I want to thank my member for leaving me as much time as she did.

I would just say very quickly, because I have one minute and 12 seconds left, two things: If one thing is heart-wrenching, as a member of provincial Parliament—all of us have experienced grandparents who come into our constituency office and say, "I can't have access to my grandchildren." I can tell you, as a grandfather, that is pretty hard to take. This particular bill gives us an opportunity to deal with this.

Are there problems? Absolutely. But I think, with good time at committee to be able to think this through as far as amendment, we should be able to figure out how we can make sure that when it comes to ordering up a separation, we can actually figure out how grandparents and others can have access to the grandchildren. Because never mind us as grandparents; the kids themselves have got to know who their family is. They have to have that connection. If this bill can assist in doing that, I think it's something we should all support.

On behalf of all those people I've had to speak to over the last 20-some-odd years who have no access to their grandchildren, like May, who I just spoke to last week, who has lost access to her grandson who's about six or seven years old—hopefully this will give people like May the kind of hope they need so that one day they can be reunited with their grandchildren.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate today. From the outset, I want to praise the member from Niagara Falls for having the tenacity and the stick-to-it-iveness to keep bringing this bill forward until it eventually gets passed. From the comments I have heard to date, certainly, I expect this bill to pass.

I think a lot of us have drawn on our own personal experiences, and I think we do that on a regular basis when we bring our advice and comments to the debate in the House. One of the voids in my own life is that I only knew one grandparent for a very short period of time. Two of my grandparents were killed in the Blitz during the Second World War, and so when I was born in the mid-1950s, I just never knew these people. My wife, on the other hand, grew up with almost a full set of grandparents, and she had a much different view of her grandparents. She knew them well.

I am at the stage of my life when I could now potentially be a grandparent, and some people have said, "You shouldn't give your children hints about becoming a grandparent." I'll tell you, my wife is shameless in pestering my son to become a father, so that that would make us grandparents. It's still a bit of a mystery to me what being a grandparent is all about, but if my wife gets her way, we'll be finding out very shortly.

In the 1960s and 1970s, as the nuclear family started to break up a little bit—the breakup started to accelerate I

guess would be the best way of putting it—there was a saying: "Don't worry about the kids. They'll bounce back." Over the fullness of time, I think we've found out that kids didn't often bounce back. Often, when the family had fractured, the only stable part of that family was the partnership that existed between either set of grandparents. While the parents sorted it out, often the kids were left to their own devices.

I think that's a perfect example of where grandparents can play a major role in a child's life. You can look at a number of cultures around the world where the elders are put in a position of esteem, where they're valued, where they're shown that they hold a special place in our society. By bringing this bill forward, the member from Niagara Falls is trying to establish in law the ability for those grandparents to actually have that special status protected.

I want to thank the member for his tenacity. I want to thank him for the ideas he brings to this House. I want to thank grandparents all over the province of Ontario who, despite the lack of legislation in this regard, play a role in their grandchildren's lives. They say that it takes a village to raise a child. Probably the next step out into that village from the actual parents themselves is often the grandparents.

I haven't heard anybody speaking against this bill. I think the task of this House is to get this bill out of the House into committee, and then we all need to do our part in encouraging our respective parties and House leaders, perhaps, to ensure that this bill finally becomes legislation. You've certainly got to give the member credit: He's brought it back time and time again. I think the people he is representing who have backed him along the way are hoping he achieves the success he is asking us to give him support for today.

If you knew your grandparents, if you didn't know your grandparents, all of us in this House understand the value behind grandparents in our society and in all those societies that make up the multicultural fabric of Canadian society. I would urge all members in the House to support this bill and allow it to move forward. Let's work together to make it become law.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I am very pleased to be a co-sponsor of Bill 67, which would of course amend the Children's Law Reform Act with respect to children's relationships with their grandparents. I also would like to applaud the member from Niagara Falls for his persistence in continuing to bring this important bill forward, and also to thank my colleague the member from Parkdale-High Park, whom I've had the pleasure of co-sponsoring several bills with lately. It's truly been a pleasure.

1600

I'd also like to thank all the grandparents who are here today, and particularly I'd like to thank a few people from my own riding of Whitby-Oshawa: Ms. Lynn Porteous, and also Mr. and Mrs. Alexander, who have

spent an incredible amount of time, effort and, I think, expense in preparing packages to all of us as MPPs here at Queen's Park. I'm sorry, I don't have my package here with me today. They're beautifully decorated with great messages on them, exhorting us all to be supportive of this bill. So I'd like to thank them as well.

This is an important bill for grandparents in Ontario but also for children. As the member from Niagara Falls indicated, this bill does not guarantee that children will have an extended relationship with their grandparents. In some cases—a very small number of cases, I would suggest—that might not be appropriate. But what it does say—and it's going to ultimately be up to the courts to decide—is that the list that the court has to take into consideration when determining the best interests of a child, which is the determining test, should consider what the nature of the relationship is between the child and his or her grandparents.

I have to say, in my previous life as a practising lawyer, I did have the opportunity to practise in the area of family law a little bit, and I think there's nothing more sad or corrosive than the custody and access court issues that come before you as a lawyer and that the courts have to decide. It's obviously preferable if these things can be worked out. In some cases, they can't. But what this does is simply bolster the need for the courts to consider what the relationship is between the parents and the grandparents.

In my own case, and just on a personal note, one of the saddest things for me in being a parent is that my own children didn't get to enjoy a relationship with my parents. My father passed away before they were born, and my mother passed away when my sons were only four. So they grew up without having their grandparents going to concerts, to grandparents' day at school and so on. I think that's something that they really missed out on, because I saw the relationships that other parents had with the grandparents and with the children, and it's very positive and it adds a whole element to a child's life that they wouldn't otherwise experience—a closeness with a grandparent who loves you unconditionally.

So I would ask for all-party support of this. Let's get it into committee and let's move forward with it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Niagara Falls, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Kim Craitor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have a couple of minutes just to wrap up. Thank you to all the members who supported the bill and spoke on it.

I want to make just a personal comment. This bill is more than a bill to me. I want to dedicate it to two very kind and special people. I never knew my parents. I never met them; I don't know who they are. But two elderly people took me into their house and kept me and raised me. They were more like grandparents than parents, and by the time I was 16, they had both passed away. I often think, when I look at my life, how fortunate it was that

these two elderly people decided that they would raise me, give me some of their values, give me some of their best advice.

When the grandparents came in to see me, to talk about not having an opportunity to see their grandchildren—Nick and Mary Craitor came to me. I remember thinking how fortunate it was that these two people believed in me, as a child, even though I wasn't their child, and took me in. So this bill has never been about just a bill. It has been a bill that I very passionately, truly believe in, and that's why I've been committed in every way I can to having the bill get through. So I want to say for the record, and I never thought I'd have an opportunity to say this in Parliament: To Nick and Mary Craitor, I owe you everything, and I thank you for that.

I thank all the members again for speaking so eloquently on the bill, and I'm looking forward to support of the bill. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC SECTOR COMPENSATION FREEZE ACT, 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR LE GEL GLOBAL DE LA RÉMUNÉRATION DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal first with ballot item number 43, standing in the name of Mr. Yurek.

Mr. Yurek has moved second reading of Bill 92. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a lot of noes.

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion, please say "nay."

I believe the nays have it.

We will take the vote at the end of regular business.

PESTICIDES AMENDMENT ACT (LICENCE FOR COSMETIC PURPOSES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PESTICIDES (LICENCE À DES FINS ESTHÉTIQUES)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Chudleigh has moved second reading of Bill 88.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes again.

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

We will also defer the vote to the end of regular business.

CHILDREN'S LAW REFORM
AMENDMENT ACT (RELATIONSHIP
WITH GRANDPARENTS), 2012
LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI
PORTANT RÉFORME DU DROIT
DE L'ENFANCE (RELATION
AVEC LES GRANDS-PARENTS)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Craitor has moved second reading of Bill 67. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), the bill is being referred to—Mr. Craitor?

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'd like to refer this bill to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Shall the request that the bill be referred to the regulations and private bills committee—agreed? Agreed.

COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC SECTOR
COMPENSATION FREEZE ACT, 2012
LOI DE 2012 SUR LE GEL GLOBAL
DE LA RÉMUNÉRATION
DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Call in the members. It will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1606 to 1611.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can all members please take their seats?

Mr. Yurek has moved second reading of Bill 92.

All those in favour, please stand and remain standing.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Jones, Sylvia	O'Toole, John
Bailey, Robert	Klees, Frank	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Barrett, Toby	Leone, Rob	Pettapiece, Randy
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLaren, Jack	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	MacLeod, Lisa	Shurman, Peter
Dunlop, Garfield	McDonnell, Jim	Smith, Todd
Elliott, Christine	McKenna, Jane	Walker, Bill
Fedeli, Victor	McNaughton, Monte	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Yakabuski, John
Harris, Michael	Milligan, Rob E.	Yurek, Jeff
Hudak, Tim	Munro, Julia	
Jackson, Rod	Nicholls, Rick	

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All those opposed, please stand and remain standing.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Murray, Glen R.
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Forster, Cindy	Naqvi, Yasir
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Gélinas, France	Natyshak, Taras
Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Prue, Michael
Bradley, James J.	Hoskins, Eric	Qaadri, Shafiq
Broten, Laurel C.	Jeffrey, Linda	Sandals, Liz
Campbell, Sarah	Kwinter, Monte	Schein, Jonah
Cansfield, Donna H.	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	MacCharles, Tracy	Singh, Jagmeet

Coteau, Michael	Mangat, Amrit
Crack, Grant	Mantha, Michael
Craitor, Kim	Marchese, Rosario
Damerla, Dipika	Matthews, Deborah
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil
Dickson, Joe	Miller, Paul
DiNovo, Cheri	Milloy, John
Duguid, Brad	Moridi, Reza

Tabuns, Peter
Takhar, Harinder S.
Taylor, Monique
Vanthof, John
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 34; the nays are 52.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negated.

PESTICIDES AMENDMENT ACT
(LICENCE FOR COSMETIC
PURPOSES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES PESTICIDES
(LICENCE À DES FINS ESTHÉTIQUES)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Chudleigh has moved second reading of Bill 88. We just have to open the doors to let other members in.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Jones, Sylvia	O'Toole, John
Bailey, Robert	Klees, Frank	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Barrett, Toby	Leone, Rob	Pettapiece, Randy
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLaren, Jack	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	MacLeod, Lisa	Shurman, Peter
Dunlop, Garfield	McDonnell, Jim	Smith, Todd
Elliott, Christine	McKenna, Jane	Walker, Bill
Fedeli, Victor	McNaughton, Monte	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Yakabuski, John
Harris, Michael	Milligan, Rob E.	Yurek, Jeff
Hudak, Tim	Munro, Julia	
Jackson, Rod	Nicholls, Rick	

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Moridi, Reza
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Forster, Cindy	Murray, Glen R.
Bisson, Gilles	Gélinas, France	Naqvi, Yasir
Bradley, James J.	Horwath, Andrea	Natyshak, Taras
Broten, Laurel C.	Hoskins, Eric	Prue, Michael
Campbell, Sarah	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Cansfield, Donna H.	Kwinter, Monte	Schein, Jonah
Colle, Mike	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Coteau, Michael	MacCharles, Tracy	Singh, Jagmeet
Crack, Grant	Mangat, Amrit	Tabuns, Peter
Craitor, Kim	Mantha, Michael	Takhar, Harinder S.
Damerla, Dipika	Marchese, Rosario	Taylor, Monique
Delaney, Bob	Matthews, Deborah	Vanthof, John
Dhillon, Vic	McMeekin, Ted	Wong, Soo
Dickson, Joe	McNeely, Phil	Wynne, Kathleen O.
DiNovo, Cheri	Miller, Paul	Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 34; the nays are 51.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Point of order, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, a point of order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'd like to correct my record. Earlier today I said that no request had been made to adjust staffing levels at Ornge. I want to clarify that no approval has been given and make it clear that there will be no changes to staffing levels on Ornge's aircrafts.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member is allowed to correct her own record. It's a point of order.

Orders of the day?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I think you'll find there's unanimous consent to recess the House until 5 o'clock.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Is there unanimous consent to recess the House until 5 o'clock? Agreed.

This House stands recessed until 5 o'clock.

The House recessed from 1620 to 1700.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Orders of the day?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I think you'll find we have unanimous consent for the House to take another recess and for the members to be called back through a five-minute bell.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): There's unanimous consent, I understand, for the House to be recessed and called back in on a five-minute bell. Agreed? Agreed.

This House stands recessed.

The House recessed from 1700 to 1729.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Orders of the day.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Milloy is seeking unanimous consent without notice. Agreed? Agreed.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move that, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House, there be a timetable applied to the consideration of certain business of the House as follows:

(a) Private members' public bills

No later than Thursday, November 1, 2012, the House leaders of the three recognized parties shall, by agreement indicated in writing to the Clerk of the House, select up to nine private members' public bills, three per party, for consideration in accordance with the following process:

If any of the selected bills is currently ordered for third reading, the order for third reading shall be discharged and the bill shall be recommitted to the same standing committee to which it was originally referred, and the respective committee shall meet at the call of the Chair for up to 90 minutes of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

Any other of the selected bills, after receiving second reading during private members' public business, shall be referred to a standing committee in the normal way, and the respective committee shall meet at the call of the Chair for up to one day of public hearings and up to one day of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, on dates and at times as agreed to by the committee; and

Any bill recommitted or referred to a standing committee under this section shall be reported back to the House no later than Thursday, November 29, 2012. In the event any of the selected bills are not reported by that day, such bills shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House and at such time the bills shall be ordered for third reading; and

The order for third reading of one of the indicated bills standing in the name of a member of the official opposition and one of the indicated bills standing in the name of a member of the third party shall be called no later than Wednesday, June 13, 2012; and

The orders for third reading of two of the indicated bills standing in the names of members of the official opposition and two of the indicated bills standing in the names of members of the third party shall be called no later than Wednesday, December 12, 2012; and

When the order for third reading of any of the selected bills is called, 60 minutes shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

In the event of prorogation, any of the selected bills remaining on the Orders and Notices paper at prorogation shall be continued and placed on the Orders and Notices paper of the second sessional day of the second session of the 40th Parliament at the same stage of progress as at prorogation, and the timelines in this section shall continue to apply.

(b) Committees

The following committees are authorized to meet during the 2012 summer adjournment:

Standing Committee on Public Accounts: for the purpose of considering the Special Report of the Auditor General on Ornge Air Ambulance and Related Services, on June 26, July 18 and July 31, and August 1 and August 2. Any of these dates are transferrable to another date by agreement of the subcommittee on committee business, and the committee may meet on additional dates as agreed to in writing by the House leaders of the recognized parties and filed with the Clerk of the House; and

The committee is also authorized to attend the 2012 Annual Conference of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees.

Standing Committee on General Government: for the purpose of its review of the Aggregate Resources Act, on up to four days during June/July, on dates and in locations in Ontario established by the committee.

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs: the committee shall be assigned the review of the auto insurance industry, currently being conducted by the Standing Committee on General Government pursuant to standing order 111, and that all evidence and papers relating to this review be transferred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs; and

The committee is authorized to meet during the summer adjournment for the purpose of this review on up to four days during June/July, on dates and in locations in Ontario established by the committee.

Standing Committee on Estimates: for the purpose of considering estimates, on up to four days during June/July, on dates established by the committee.

Standing Committee on Government Agencies: for the purpose of reviewing the operations of the Liquor Control Board of Ontario, on up to two days in June, and of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, on up to two days in July, on dates and in locations in Ontario established by the committee.

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly: for the purpose of its review of the standing orders, on up to four days during June/July, on dates established by the committee; and that for the purpose of its review of the standing orders the committee is further authorized to adjourn from place to place as unanimously agreed to by its subcommittee on committee business; and

The committee is also authorized to attend the 2012 annual meeting of the National Conference of State Legislatures.

(c) Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts

When Bill 55 is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs; and

The committee is authorized to meet for the purpose of public hearings on the bill in accordance with the following schedule:

June 6: 9 a.m. to 10:25 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.;

June 7: 9 a.m. to 10:25 a.m. and 3 p.m. to 9 p.m.;

June 8: 1 p.m. to 9 p.m.;

June 11: 9 a.m. to 10:25 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.;

June 12: 9 a.m. to 12 noon.

The deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the clerk of the committee shall be 6 p.m. on Tuesday, June 12, 2012; and

The committee is authorized to meet for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill in accordance with the following schedule:

June 14: 9 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.;

June 18: 9 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.;

June 19: 9 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

At 2 p.m. on Tuesday, June 19, those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. Any division required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession, with one 20-minute waiting period allowed pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

The committee is authorized to meet beyond its hour of adjournment for clause-by-clause consideration on June 19, 2012.

The report of the committee on the bill shall be deemed to have been made, and shall be deemed to be received and adopted when reports by committees is called by the Speaker on June 20, and at such time, the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order shall then immediately be called; and

Two hours shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

If a recorded vote is required on the motion for third reading of the bill, the vote shall be deferred until deferred votes.

In the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

(d) Bill 19, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of the rent increase guideline

When Bill 19 is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy; and

The committee is authorized to meet for the purpose of public hearings on the bill during its regular meeting times on Thursday, June 7; and

The deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the clerk of the committee shall be 2 p.m. on Friday, June 8, 2012; and

The committee is authorized to meet for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill following routine proceedings on Monday, June 11; and

The committee shall report the bill to the House not later than Tuesday, June 12. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

Upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill

shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called on that same day; and

When the order for third reading of the bill is called, two hours shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

The vote on third reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

In the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order?

1740

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order: Member from Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm sure that if I spoke about something meaningful for about two seconds, our government House leader would be able to have a drink of water and finish his very long motion.

Hon. John Milloy: Members will be glad. I'm getting to the funny part in a second. Anyway.

(e) Parliamentary calendar

Notwithstanding standing order 6(a)(i), the House shall continue to meet from Monday, June 11 to Thursday, June 14, 2012; and

On June 14, 2012, the House shall adjourn following deferred votes and it shall stand adjourned until Wednesday, June 20, 2012; and

The order of business on June 20 shall be as follows:

Nine o'clock, prayers;

Reports by committees;

Orders of the day, which will be third reading debate on Bill 55;

Oral questions;

Deferred votes—a 30-minute recess, if required;

Introduction of bills, for the purpose of permitting the introduction of first reading of a government bill providing for the following:

An amendment to subsection 29(2) of the Taxation Act, 2007, to provide that a corporation's basic rate of tax for a taxation year ending after June 30, 2012, is 11.5%; and

An amendment to the Taxation Act, 2007, to increase to 13.16% the tax rate for individuals on taxable income over \$500,000 and to make such other technical amendments to that act as may be appropriate to implement this tax rate, including consequential amendments to other tax rates under that act; and

That the orders for second and third reading of this bill shall immediately be called consecutively; and

The Speaker shall put the question on the motions for second and third reading of the bill immediately, without debate or amendment, no deferral of either vote being permitted; and

In the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

Except that:

In the event that the required amendments are not made to Bill 55, the first order of business at introduction of bills and immediately following deferred votes shall be the introduction of a government bill to amend the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999, in such a way as to permit the Taxation Act, 2007, to be amended to increase the tax rate for individuals with a taxable income over \$500,000; and

That the orders for second and third reading of this bill shall immediately be called; and

The Speaker shall put the question on the motions for second and third reading of the bill immediately, without debate or amendment, no deferral of the vote being permitted; and

In the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes; and

Following the passage of third reading, there will be a 30-minute recess to allow for royal assent to be given to this bill and Bill 55; and

Upon the announcement of royal assent in the House, the proceeding "Introduction of bills" shall continue as set out above.

Adjournment of the House, without motion, will take place until Monday, September 10, 2012.

(f) Board of Internal Economy

The passage of this motion shall constitute an order to the Attorney General to introduce a bill, no later than the third day the House meets in the fall sessional period, to amend section 87 of the Legislative Assembly Act respecting the Board of Internal Economy as follows:

That the commissioners appointed to the Board of Internal Economy shall be:

(a) the Speaker, who will serve as non-voting chair;

(b) one member of the executive council;

(c) one member from the caucus of each recognized opposition party;

(d) one or more members of the government caucus, as necessary, to provide that the total number of commissioners appointed under clause (b) and by the government caucus equals the number of commissioners appointed under clause (c); and

That the orders for second and third reading of the bill shall be called consecutively at the outset of morning orders of the day on the first Tuesday following introduction of the bill; and

The Speaker shall put the question on the motions for second and third reading of the bill immediately, without debate or amendment; and

In the event of prorogation, the order in this section to the Attorney General shall endure and the bill shall be introduced no later than the third sessional day of the second session of the 40th Parliament, and the other timelines in this section shall continue to apply.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order: Member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I know it's picayune, but there's one slight little thing that you did here. On page 6, "Following the passage of third reading," you said, "there will be a 30-minute bell." It reads, "there shall be." Just to stand the record correct.

Hon. John Milloy: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I wish to correct the record. On the section under "Board of Internal Economy," my motion is that the orders for second and third reading of the bill shall be called consecutively at the outset of morning orders of the day on the first Tuesday following introduction of the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Mr. Milloy has moved that, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House, there be a—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Agreed? Agreed.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

STRONG ACTION FOR ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2012

LOI DE 2012 SUR UNE ACTION ÉNERGIQUE POUR L'ONTARIO (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 29, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 55, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to the order just passed, I'm now required to put the question.

Mr. Duguid has moved second reading of Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The bill is ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: There was a no.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): No?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: There were two noes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Sorry; I missed that.

All those in favour of the motion?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I think there may have been some confusion among some of the members in the calling of that.

I seek unanimous consent that we put the question again.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Milloy seeks unanimous consent to put the question again. Agreed? The motion is carried.

Mr. Duguid has moved second reading of Bill 55, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

I heard a couple of nays.

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I believe, Mr. Speaker, I can help out with that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I've received a letter from the Minister of Finance. Pursuant to standing order 28(h), he requests that the vote on the motion be deferred until June 4, 2012. Agreed? Agreed.

Second reading vote deferred.

RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES AMENDMENT ACT (RENT INCREASE GUIDELINE), 2012

LOI DE 2012 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA LOCATION À USAGE D'HABITATION (TAUX LÉGAL D'AUGMENTATION DES LOYERS)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 30, 2012, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 19, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of the rent increase guideline / Projet de loi 19, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation en ce qui concerne le taux légal d'augmentation des loyers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to the order just passed, I'm now required to put the question.

Ms. Wynne has moved second reading of Bill 19, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 in respect of the rent increase guideline. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

This will be a five-minute bell.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I've received a note from Minister Wynne. Pursuant to standing order 28(h), a request is made to defer the vote on the motion until June 4, 2012. Agreed? Agreed.

Second reading vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Orders of the day.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The government House leader has moved adjournment of the House. Agreed?

Interjections: No.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): You don't want to go home?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those against, please say "nay."

The ayes have it.

This House stands adjourned until Monday at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1751.

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Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

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Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
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Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
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Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre de Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
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Craiton, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Damerla, Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development and Innovation / Ministre du Développement économique et de l'Innovation
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Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
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Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
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Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
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McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Government / Chef du gouvernement Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
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Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
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Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
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Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
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Liz Sandals, Jagmeet Singh
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permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Vic Dhillon, Randy Hillier
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Bill Walker
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Cheri DiNovo, Kevin Daniel Flynn
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